

# **The Ramayan and other Oral Narratives of the Kunknas**

Documented by Dahyabhai Vadhu

Translated by Avaneesh Bhatt



Central Institute of Indian Languages

and

Bhasha Research and Publication Centre

***The Ramayan and other Oral Narratives of the Kunknas***

Documented by Dahyabhai Vadhu

Translated by Avaneesh Bhatt

First published 2012

© Central Institute of Indian Languages and Bhasha Research and Publication Centre

All rights reserved. This material may not be reproduced or transmitted, either in part or full, in any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Publication No. 1008

ISBN No. 978-81-7373-107-4

Layout and Cover Design by Niraj Kenge

Photo Courtesy: Sunil Bhoys

Typeset in 10.5/13.5 pt. Aldine 401BT

Published by

Central Institute of Indian Languages

Manasagangotri, P.O. Hunsur Road

Mysore 570 006, India

Grams : BHARATI

Phone : 0091/0821-2345000

Fax : 0091/0821-2515032

website : <http://www.ciil.org>

and

Bhasha Research and Publication Centre

37 Shreenathdham Duplex

Opp. Shrinagar Society, Behind Dinesh Mill

Vadodara 390 007

Gujarat

Tel : 0265-2331968, 2353347

Fax: 0265-2359059

email: [purvapakash.publication@gmail.com](mailto:purvapakash.publication@gmail.com)

website: [www.bhasharesearch.org](http://www.bhasharesearch.org)

Printed at Shivam Offset, Vadodara

₹ 200/-

*For  
Gayatri and Nihshalya  
Love and Life*



## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Dr G. N. Devy for introducing me to oral literature. The overwhelming power of written words makes us ignore those who speak but do not write; luckily, since I had taken up this translation, I learnt about the rich treasure of unwritten literature. The ideas of Dr Devy have influenced me deeply, shaping my point of view as a photographer as well. I realised this when I recently reviewed my photos and saw a pattern in the themes: photos about the plight of potters, about the creative energy of slum-dwellers, about the importance of ordinary men in animating city-life. Boundless energy, a perceptive mind, and determination—I would like to inculcate from Dr Devy these qualities as well; but, one can cultivate only a few traits, not all, if one is not gifted, that I have now learnt. Need I note here that I frequently and religiously return to Dr Devy's literary writing?

I appreciate Dahyabhai Vadhu for carefully compiling the Kunkna Ramayan and Tales. He patiently clarified my doubts and queries, helping me to understand the nuances of words. We require a number of such diligent document makers, so that the hidden wealth of oral literature becomes available to people.

I am grateful to the Central Institute of Indian Languages for their support to this publication. Smt. M.M.P. Shah Women's College of Arts (Mumbai), where I teach, has been my lifeline. I am grateful to my college, my colleagues, and especially to the library staff.

Bhabhu, Mummy, Mehul, Sibyl, Jeetubhai, and Chummy have always stood by me and supported me. Will I ever be able to do something for them?

Avaneesh Bhatt

## Contents

Foreword	ix
Preface	xv
Introduction	xxi
Kunkna Ramayan	1
Kunkna Oral Narratives	87-168
Tale of Satimata	89
King Mansinha and Queen Salvan	105
Tale of Kansari	124
Tale of Una	153
Glossary	169





## Foreword

‘I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any... I would have our young men and women... to learn as much of English and other world languages as they like, and then expect them to give the benefits of their learning to India and to the world.... But I would not have a single Indian to forget, neglect or be ashamed of his mother tongue, or to feel that he or she cannot think or express the best thoughts in his or own vernacular.’

(Mahatma Gandhi on *English Learning*, *Young India* 01:06:1921)

Traditionally, India is viewed as a pluralistic society that is supportive of all languages—big or small. The Indian Constitution is committed to the language rights of all, including the right to mother tongue education. However, the education system has encouraged more the growth of dominant languages, and in practice, most of the smaller languages are not included. This has resulted in marginalization of diverse linguistic communities and enhanced the threat perceptions to their languages. If recent UNESCO reports are to be believed then we seem to have all kinds of language situations ranging from potentially endangered to those on the verge of extinction.

But the exact picture can only be given if serious research is undertaken to survey the socio-linguistic settings in all states and

native speakers are involved as partners to report from within. To safeguard these languages we also need to formulate clear cut plans for the empowerment of these languages and their speakers. This would involve linking languages with literacy, education, technology and economic opportunities. Fortunately, an institutional arrangement has been put in place to develop all Indian languages, regardless of their status as official languages or their inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

Bharatiya Bhasha Sansthan or Central Institute of Indian Languages was set up with its main objective being 'to assist in and coordinate the development of Indian languages, to bring about the essential unity of Indian languages through scientific study and inter-linguistic research and to promote the mutual enrichment of the languages and thus contribute towards emotional integration of the people of this country.' While spelling out its role as the nodal agency that will coordinate the endeavors of all language institutions, it was expected to function on several fronts including undertaking work that will 'promote the development of languages of Scheduled Tribes'. The Central Institute of Indian Languages has contributed immensely in this direction and its work on documentation, description and development of minor languages has given it the identity of an institution that values diversity even as it works to promote multilingualism with strong roots in mother tongue.

The Bhili mother tongues are an illustration of this commitment to treating all languages as equal. For years, the Central Institute of Indian Languages undertook experimental work with the Wagdi speaking tribes in Rajasthan and in the process they produced bilingual primers, trained teachers, held orientation camps for administrators dealing with education of these tribes and undertook testing and evaluation work to demonstrate the worthiness of their pursuit of putting mother tongues as partners of official languages. The work was extended to include the Varli tribes in Dadra and Nagar Haveli, where both Dungar Varli and Davar Varli were linked

to Marathi and Gujarati respectively, and for years the states were involved to take up their cause. The fact that both the states did not adopt the materials and methods as part of their long term policy only illustrates how complex these issues are and how strong is the resistance to innovative ideas.

It is in these circumstances that the Central Institute of Indian Languages looks for partners who value our mission; and Bhasha Research and Publication Centre, founded by Ganesh Devy, in Vadodara, is one such trusted partner helping us to keep our vision intact. In their case, they have themselves taken the initiative to turn things around by producing materials that will be valued by the readers. The present collection of books that includes three epics in the original—*Gujrano Arelo*, *Rathod Varta* and *Ramsitmani Varta*—and three publications in English translation—*Bharath: An Epic of the Dungri Bhils*, *Rathod Varta: A Heroic Narrative of the Dungri Bhils* and *The Ramayan and other Oral Narratives of the Kunknas* is ample evidence of that spirit which is working for the empowerment of the smaller mother tongues. It is my hypothesis that this work has been positive and has given the Bhil identity a positive value.

As the Census figures illustrate, the group of Bhili mother tongues (seventeen mother tongues are listed in 2001 with more than 10,000 speakers for each) has shown a sudden spurt in its growth from 26% (1971 to 1981) to 29%( 1981-1991) to a dramatic 71% (1991-2001).

### **Decadal Growth of Bhili Mother Tongues (source Census 2001)**

Bhili/Bhilodi -17 mother tongues

Decadal Growth (No. of Speakers)

1971	1981	1991	2001
3,399,285	4,293,314	5,572,308	9,582,957

Percentage wise Decadal Growth

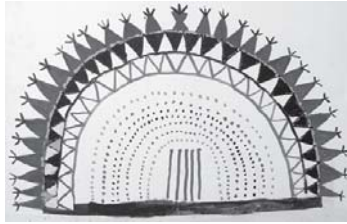
1971-81	1981-91	1991-2001
26.30	29.79	71.97

When the statistics are juxtaposed against the reports of *UNESCO Atlas on Endangered Languages 2009*, where none of the Bhili mother tongues are shown as endangered, the case study becomes even more interesting of a language and its people who want to affirm their presence on the Indian landscape. Being the largest non-scheduled language, their languages must be put on the firm path of development for they have survived the test of time. Teachers who work with these communities must make an effort to understand these mother tongues and enhance their own multilingual competence.

I hope these books will pave way for their democratic participation on a larger scale and with a sense of dignity they deserve. Eklavya was a determined Bhil who was willing to give up a piece of his hand in gratitude for his teacher but not to abandon the archery and the shooting arrow that always found its mark, and his skills leapt to greater heights in keeping with his soaring spirits.

We wish the readers a good time to draw inwards and discover the strength of their own word.

Rajesh Sachdeva  
Director  
Central Institute of Indian Languages



# **The Ramayan and other Oral Narratives of the Kunknas**



## Preface

When I was a child, my father used to tell me Kunkna tales at bedtime and in the morning my mother's songs would awaken me. She used to sing while doing her daily chores. I helped her in the kitchen so that I could get to hear her songs. My childhood was not spent merely in listening to tales and songs. My personality was conditioned by the events that took place around me.

My family was like any other Kunkna family. We were happy with the minimal means of life. The earth was our bed and the sky above served as a covering. We had a mattress made of date-palm leaves and a couple of bed sheets. I used to cover myself with my mother's sarees until I was in the seventh standard. In our kitchen, we had mud pots and a few utensils made of aluminum. Those were not the days of steel vessels. Few Kunkna families owned brass plates. Tea was not popular but liquor was widely consumed in our community.

In the beginning, we were only three persons in the family—my father, my mother and myself. Even then, my mother prepared two kinds of *rotlas*. Paddy was used for mine and father's *rotlas*; while, mother ate *rotlas* made of paddy-husk flour mixed with corn. Some women went to work in the fields of prosperous people and brought paddy-chaff in return. They mixed rice and *jowar* in it and prepared *rotlas*. We ate *rotlas* with rice broth or soup prepared of wild corn.

There were days of starvation when even this was not available.

During such days all the women went in search of *karinda*. Karinda is a bitter bulb found in our area. Women dug out the roots and boiled them. The boiled bulbs were cut and tied in a cloth. These little bags were dipped in the flowing river for an entire night so that its bitterness would be washed away. The next day, the small pieces of bulbs were eaten with hot and sour chilly chutney. Many Kunkna families lived on karinda roots throughout the year. However, we never thought of this condition as poverty. We learnt the term ‘poverty’ very late in life. My sensitivity sharpened because of many incidents that occurred in my childhood.

My mother and my aunts planted seeds in the backyard of our home. Brinjals and chillies were cultivated there. They sold these vegetables in the market. One basket of brinjals would fetch three to four rupees. The woman who returned home first from the market would feed all the children of the family. Sometimes, one woman had to suckle three to four children at a time. The memory of those days makes me sad even today.

My mother treated our cow as a member of our family. Her name was Kaval. Once, when Kaval had a miscarriage, my mother wept like a child. She embraced our cow and cried for a very long time. Kaval also had tears in her eyes—one mother shared her grief with another. On one occasion, I caught a little lark and brought it home. My mother saw it and exclaimed, ‘Look, how happy we are! We are all living happily together but imagine if somebody kidnaps you? How you would suffer! And what would happen to me then? Have you ever given a thought to this? My son, go and put the lark back in its nest. This is a mother’s loved fledgling.’ Tears filled her eyes when she spoke.

Mother once told me that I was very weak when I was young. She would take me to *bhagats* to improve my health. Sometimes she had to walk forty to fifty kilometers carrying me in her arms—all for my sake. Even then, once, out of anger, I called her ‘a servant to cook rotlas’ and did not speak to her for fifteen days.



The sudden death of my eldest uncle was a shock to the family. He had some disease of the abdomen. Many bhagats and exorcists treated him but eventually he succumbed to the disease. When my uncle died, for the first time I saw a dead body and the elderly men and women weeping violently. Due to the shock I could not cry for a very long time and when I started crying, others became quiet and started to console me.

I closely observed the Devkaren, a ritual performed after death. This ritual is performed in winter, in memory of all the ancestors of the community. The family members gather, recall the dead, and cry for the last time. It is believed that after the Devkaren ritual the dead become gods. Each ancestor has a specific person as one's intermediary for the ritual. Through the intermediaries, it becomes possible for the living family members to communicate with the departed soul. While communicating with the dead, the mediator trembles violently. The family comes to know about the last wish of the departed soul through the mediator and fulfills it.

I was fascinated by the tales of Mavli, Kansari, Devi, Devkaren narrated by the bhagats on the occasion of festivals. The 'Tale of Kansari was narrated by all bhagats with some variations. Its transformation also became a subject of discussion. Numerous rituals of our culture filled my life with excitement—the various styles of playing the *tarapu*, folk songs for each occasion of life, little girls floating small cloth dolls in the river on Divaso, the custom of offering rice to insects from the new harvest each year. I liked the religious customs but the violence upon animals scared me. I vividly remember the day when a goat was sacrificed with a single stroke of the *chandarbhal*.

During the time of the wedding season, the *nachen*, *madelwala* and *savasino* fascinated me. *Nachen*, the community theatre group that moved from one village to another, reflected the contemporary society. In its performances, the government officer was always shown as one with a big pot-belly. People enjoyed watching these

performances. I too loved them. In one of the scenes, the officer visits a poor man's place. As there was not a single chair in the host's house, the host knelt down on the floor so that the officer could sit on him. When the officer asked for water, the host got up to bring water. The pot-bellied officer fell down on his big paunch. People thoroughly enjoyed such scenes. The madelwala, adorned in the clothes of a woman, stood upon a small plate and danced on it. While dancing, the dancer also played the madel. At the time of the Kunkna wedding, five savasinos performed all the wedding rituals. One of the rituals, known as *telavana* was quite strange. The savasinos poured oil as an offering at five places—on the idol of the god, at the threshold, around the dustbin, at the pillar supporting the roof and on the mortar. During the ritual, they sang,

Goddess of Mortar is bathing in oil,  
Oil is sprinkled on the mortar,  
Goddess of Mortar is bathing in oil.

I always had to take the bullocks out for grazing. During the monsoon we made an umbrella of teak leaves. It was called *ghunghadu*. I found it awkward to move about with the *ghunghadu* in my hands! If it suddenly started to rain I sang a prayer to the Sun God to appear from behind the clouds. In my prayer, I promised to give him a goat and plenty of butter as well to smear his home with cow dung.

Oh sun! shine over us,  
I will smear your home,  
Oh sun ! come out in the sky.

Oh sun ! shine over us,  
I will sacrifice a goat for you,  
Oh sun ! come out in the sky.

Oh sun ! shine over us,  
I will give you butter to eat,  
Oh sun ! come out in the sky.

I left my village and went to stay at a hostel when I reached the

eighth standard. This began a new phase in my life. Instead of Kunkna, I had to now speak Gujarati. I took some time to pick up the language. I passed the matriculation examination with a first class and gained admission in college. My expenses doubled. In the first year of college I spent about five hundred rupees and this too did not pay completely for all my expenses. As I was the eldest in the family, I was sufficiently mature to understand the situation. The cost was beyond our capacity. I developed an aversion to college education and discontinued my college studies. My parents found this unusual and sought help of the bhagats. I explained the situation to them. The education of my three younger siblings, Yashwant, Mahendra and my sister, was possible only if I started to earn. I convinced them that the expectations they had from me could be realised only if I began to work. This phase thus got over by my maturing to manhood.

Later, I had to move to Ahmedabad for my new job. Mr. Ramesh Joshi, my colleague, suggested a few books for me to read. I read several books on folk literature. I was convinced that the folk literature of my native region is immensely valuable and that I should present these songs and tales to the world. Thus, I picked up my pen. In the beginning, I wrote about the customs and rituals of our culture. I wrote many essays in *Rangtarang*, a Gujarati monthly. Then I wrote tales for children, popular in our oral tradition. Since 1986, I have given many talks that have been broadcast over the radio.

In the meanwhile, I changed my job and joined a bank. In 1981, I was posted at Vyara, later I moved to Moti Daman and in 1990, I was transferred to Lunawada. My friend, Mr. Kishor Ramdevaputram introduced me to Prof. Kanji Patel. Prof. Patel published the ‘Tale of Kansari’ in *Gadyaparva*. Thus, a tale in the Kunkna language was first presented to the Gujarati community. The tale was well-received and appreciated by many. My friendship with Prof. Patel turned out to be fruitful. He introduced me to Dr. Ganesh Devy. During a workshop at Saputara, Dr Devy and I decided that oral literature should be documented and published.

This resulted in my taking up the documentation of Kunkna stories. A simple labour of love, it took a serious scale with the co-operation, warmth and guidance of Dr. Devy, founder of the Bhasha Research & Publication Centre, and Prof. Kanji Patel. I had been groping in the dark as an unsteady toddler, but with the support of these stalwarts, I started to walk confidently with steady steps—and the result is in your hands now. At this stage, I express my gratitude to all the known and unknown people who have helped in bringing out this volume. I specially mention the role played by my wife to whom I am thankful as she accepted my busy schedule without any complaint. She provided me with all the comforts and even provided our family with financial support. She took over all the responsibilities and burden of the household to give me complete freedom so that I could dedicate myself to writing.

*The Ramayan and other Oral Narratives of the Kunknas* in English translation is based on two of my previous works—*Kunkna Ramkatha* (Shri Jhaverchand Meghani Lokvidya Sanshodhan Bhawan, 2003) and *Kunkna Kathao* (Sahitya Akademi, 2000). I would like to mention that the present translation of ‘Kunkna Ramayan’ is carried out from my own revised and unpublished writing of ‘Kunkna Ramkatha’. I would like to thank Avaneesh Bhatt for his sensitive translation of my works. I hope that the readers will enjoy these.

Dahyabhai Vadhu  
Ahwa

Translated from Gujarati by Avaneesh Bhatt

## Introduction

Earlier, the terms 'Kunkna' and 'Konkana' were used for the Hindu community living in the Konkana region. The word Kunkna has been derived from the Persian word 'canarim,' meaning 'sea shore'. The Arab merchants used the term 'canarim' for the people staying in the coastal region. The Portuguese continued using the same term and stabilized its meaning.

Historical documents say that the Konkana region was a fully developed province. The northern border was Nagasarika (now Navasari) ending at river Purna. Puri (now Thane) was its capital. Even today, the Konkana population begins from the south of river Purna. According to the Vikram Calendar, between 1216 and 1220, a battle took place between the great Kunkna king, Mallikarjuna and the troop of Amrabhatta (Ambada), the chief knight of Kumarapala, the king of Gujarat. The battle took place between the region which is now known as Chikhali and river Kaveri. During the battle, Mallikarjuna fell from his elephant and got killed. The victory of Kumarapala was not merely a change of administration, it brought about a major alteration in society and language of the region.

The people of the northern Konkana region worshipped Mallikarjuna. Until his battle with Amrabhatta, he remained unconquerable due to the support of his subjects. He was killed only because he fell from the elephant. However, his people became victims of Kumarpala's wrath for their devotion to Mallikarjuna.

After Kumarapala's victory, they escaped and found shelter in the forests. Even today they live in forests.

The language spoken by the Kunkna people is called Kunkna. This community resides in two states of our country: Gujarat and Maharashtra. In both these states, the dominating languages have influenced the Kunkna language, for it is the regional language that is used for education and commerce. The people of the community use Kunkna for daily communication but when they communicate with those outside the community, they use either Marathi or Gujarati. Moreover, the Kunkna language does not have words for the new instruments of the modern age. Obviously, English words are also used to refer to them. Sometimes, people who do not know Kunkna use a mix of Kunkna, Gujarati and Hindi, producing a vastly different version of the original language.

Thus, there is no standard form of the Kunkna language. The language of Dang district is called 'Dangi'. However, 'Dangi' is also used by those who are not 'Kunknas', therefore 'Dangi' has become a mix of various languages. In Vaghai, Gadhavi and Jamatapada areas of Dang, a purer form of Kunkna is used. But in Pipaladahad, Chinchali and Morajhira regions, the language is more influenced by Ghati Marathi. Similarly, the language of Saputara and Malegaon is heavily influenced by Marathi. All the regions on the borders of Maharashtra use the Kunkna version of language that is dominated by Marathi.

The language spoken in Valsad district can be divided into three regional belts. The developed parts of Chikhali, Vansada and Dharampur speak Kunkna deeply influenced by Gujarati. More than half the words in the language spoken here belong to Gujarati. However, the hilly regions here have retained the original Kunkna. Kunkna spoken here has an equal influence of Gujarati and Marathi but the regions on the borders of Gujarat and Maharashtra seem to have borrowed more from Marathi.

Kunkna is a distinct language. Similarly, its oral tradition is very special. The people of the community celebrate several festivals

and their oral literature is associated with these festivals and occasions. I have presented here the story of *Ramayan* along with the tales popular in the Kunkna community.

In almost all regions of India, since ancient times, a variety of stories are popular in which Ram is the protagonist. Such stories are known even in Adivasi cultures. The oldest of these stories is found in Jaina literature. Valmiki, the great ascetic, compiled stories popular in the regions on the bank of river Narmada and rendered them into Sanskrit under the title *Ramayan: The Journey of Ram's Enlightenment*. This particular narrative, compiled by Valmiki, which has influenced most of the versions, is among the most popular. One must note, however, that every story or tale cannot be called *Ramayan*. For instance, stories in the oral tradition are meant for listening, not for reading; they are performed before an audience. The audience keeps changing at every performance and is desirous of hearing references to their beliefs and customs in the stories. Because of this, the performer introduces changes at every recitation, alluding to the cultural practices in currency at that particular place and time.

The Kunkna version of the *Ramayan* is not an indigenous story; on the contrary, it is imported from other regions of India. The performer of the Kunkna story re-imagines it in the settings familiar to the Kunkna people and thus satisfies listeners who recognise the customs and locales mentioned by the narrator. Consequently, people associate many sites and monuments of their region with the incidents of the stories and are proud of believing that the characters of the stories had actually visited those places. Numerous regional versions of the *Ramayan* stories, available in the collection of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, are puzzling to scholars as they are so amorphous.

Dang lies on the border between South Gujarat and Maharashtra. Many believe that the Dandak forest mentioned in the *Ramayan* is the Dang of today. As one can experience elsewhere in India, the folk-life of Dang reflects the influence of the *Ramayan*

in the names of the people and the site. For instance, the region has a beautiful area called Sitavan; it has a village named Sitapur and two ponds with the name Anjankund and Unaikund. Another village is called Subir, a name derived from the character of Sabari. Greeting each other with a 'Ram-Ram' is a practice here.

The story of Ram, as popular in the Dang is not a piece of literature, but a social document. When people did not have modern means of entertainment available to them, they listened to public recitations of stories. The story teller, also known as bhagat, sang and told the narratives as well as enacted certain incidents. Thus, they used the powers of expression to evoke the emotional mood of the stories. Because of this people came again and again to listen to the stories and gained emotional fulfillment. The tellers of such stories had a respectable status in society since they kept the oral literature alive.

The Kunkna story of Ram shows some alterations in the characters and their actions. Ascetics and demons, prevalent in other versions found in India, are absent. Visvamitra and Tadaka are not mentioned at all; the fight between Sugriva and Vali too is not touched upon. The incident of the bitchy washerman is not found in this version. Ram's mother is Gorilakshmi not Kausalya; Narandev, a demi-god, plays a pivotal role in the Kunkna story. Bhilyakaka often said that this demi-god is God Krishna, a popular deity. It is likely that Bhilyakaka might have felt so when he attempted a comparison between other mainstream tales and the aboriginal tales like those of the Dangs. In the following tale, Ravan is shown lame, weak and ignored as a child who accidentally turns into a frightening and powerful demon. Later, as a king, Ravan becomes a tyrant, harassing everyone. Sita's wedding contest, the character of Valmak and the birth of Sita's second child—all these have been differently treated. Most significantly, all the characters including Ram are depicted as ordinary human beings engaged in daily chores, as if they belong to the laity of the Dangs. The attire of the characters and the festivals celebrated by people are also similar to those of the region.

Oral literature is like a flowing river which has many tributaries.



By the time its waters meet the ocean, fresh flows have added a lot more into the original, and at the same time, a large amount has also been wasted away or used during its long course. In the Kunkna *Ramayan*, one can note similarity with the *Mahabharat*, especially in the anecdote of the copulating deer couple. However, it is not possible to know who introduced this incident and when because we do not have a written or a standard text of the story. On the contrary, the story of Dashrath's promise to Gorilakshmi that he would not get married again after her death, and his eventual second marriage, seems in agreement with the rest of the plot. Similarly, Ravan's metamorphoses, Sita's birth, Ahalya-Anhana-Hanuman's story, Lakshman's birth, Sabresur-Subhanakha incident, Ram's first meeting with Hanuman, Magardhaj's birth, Ravan's death—all these incidents seem natural in the story in spite of their difference from the mainstream *Ramayan*. Besides, these anecdotes also evoke a distinct emotional mood.

The teller of these stories, like the people of the Dang, worships Ram, Sita and Hanuman. Hanuman is particularly popular here, as is evident from the number of shrines in the region. The religious belief of the people and their oral tradition should be separately evaluated; the god of the shrine is holy but the same god could be an ordinary human character in oral literature.

Very few performers or artistes are available today to recite this literature. About fifty years ago, Bhilyabhai and Gulababhai received the story of Ram from Rambhai Desmukh, who lived in Mahalpada. I received this story from Bhilyabhai, a seventy-five years old man, now bed-ridden and paralytic, and Gulabukaka, who could recite Ravan's entire ancestry, and died a few years ago at the ripe age of ninety-five.

This story has been received from the reciters who sang in the Kunkna language. When performed before an audience, the story is recited by trained singers who sing short verses. In between, they push the plot ahead by speaking short prose-sentences. A large dish

made of metal is the key musical instrument; the reciter strikes the dish with his hands and sings. His companions encourage him by shouting in praise.

The folk tales popular in Dang are connected with specific occasions. The ‘Tale of Satimata’ is recited at the time of birth. The recitation of this tale is done to the accompaniment of music played on a *thali* or plate. This tale is very popular in the Dang district and is narrated on the fifth day after the birth of a child. Songs of Kahderav are sung during wedding occasions. At the time of death, the ‘Tale of Salvan and Mansinha’ is narrated for ten to twelve hours.

At the time of harvest, the ‘Tale of Kansari’ is recited. Kansari is the goddess of food for the Kunkna community. A sprout is called *kasa* in Sanskrit. Kansari is derived from the word *kasa*. The tale of Kansari deals with the themes of creation, doom, re-creation, the history of human ancestors and the heroes of humankind. One version of the tale of Kansari tells a story about the origin of the earth. Each of the Kunkna homes has an idol of Kansari. In the regions of Valsad, Chikhali and Dharampur the accompanying music is that of a *ghanghali* while in Dang, a *thali* is played.

During the festival of Navaratri, the ‘Tale of Mavli’ is sung. When the tale of Dungardev is recited, the god within the cave of the mountain is invoked. In Savarkhal village of Dang district, five to six thousand people gather on the full moon day of the month of Posha. There are about thirty hills in the eastern belt of Dang where Chinchali and Morjhira villages are situated. This region is considered to be holy. The King Saler hill is situated here and his Queen Saler hill is also at the same place. There is a temple of Parashuram in this area. A number of caves are found in these mountains. There are possibilities of discovering ancient human relics in these caves. It is said that there is a *shivaling* made of mud in the cave of Sendavadegadh.

On the day of *Akhatrij*, the ritual of fertility is performed by worshipping the earth. For moments of leisure, the episodes from

*Ramayan*, *Mahabharat* and other tales are sung. There are specific songs for the occasions of wedding, sowing and reaping. The songs of Ramli are sung when the Hadal dance is performed.

The last ritual to be performed after a death is that of Devkaren. It is observed in the month of Posha. Devkaran is a collective ritual and members of any family can participate in it. The relatives of the dead gather at one place and sing songs about the origin of human life. There are songs that include dialogues between the dead body and the soul. The songs of Khanderav and Baheram are also sung on the occasion. The philosophy of death is discussed at length in these songs. In one of the songs, the dead body asks the soul, 'Why should you leave this palace of seven storeys and nine doors? Look at this beautiful palace from several angles and you would probably change your mind.' Here, the human body is described as a palace. The seven floors signify the seven parts of the body. The nine orifices are called the doors of the palace.

At the time of Devkaren, water is offered to pay tribute to the dead. There is one man who is called *ghumaro*. His body shakes violently during the ritual and it is believed that the soul of the dead enters into him. The family can learn about the last wish of the dead through the *ghumaro*. On this occasion, the relatives weep for the last time, addressing the soul of the dead person. After this ritual they never shed tears for the one who is gone.

At the end of the ritual, a betel nut or an idol is put in the *pidhi* of the family. Each family has a *pidhi*, that is a collection of betelnuts for all who have passed away in the family. The house that preserves the *pidhi* is called *devagharen*. The *pidhi* is worshipped on the full moon day of the Chaitra month. With one *devagharen*, some fifty to hundred families are associated. The day of worshipping the *pidhi* is called *bhandaro*. A gathering of the family members takes place on the same day.

At bedtime, fables similar to Panchatantra, are narrated to children. Animals play an important role in these stories. They think

and act like human beings. Verse and prose, both the forms, are used in these fables. There are tales for adolescent boys and girls and stories for young men that are told while working in the fields.

Everyday is like a festival in the life of the Kunkna community. At some place or the other, the recitation of tales goes on almost daily. These tales are narrated to the accompaniment of *ghanghali*, *thali*, *dhak*, *madal* and *sangad*.

In the Dang district, there is a tradition of playing *dera*. Dera is an instrument devised by the local people. A *mataki* is put into a basket and some leaves of teak are tied around the neck of the *mataki*. To these leaves are tied the feathers of a peacock. When the feathers are rubbed they create a very sweet tune. Kunkna women use this instrument while reciting folktales.

Musical instruments are indispensable during the performance of the folk tales. The instruments are used by the bhagats. Bhagats play the role of social workers in the Kunkna community. They can spread superstitions as well. However, I refer to those who do not mislead people. The bhagats perform religious rituals and ceremonies, as well as recite the tales meant for these occasions. Thus, they preserve the precious literary tradition of the community. They also have a good knowledge of herbal medicines. Manubhai Vadhu of Toranapera (Chikhali district) learnt the rituals performed by the bhagats only to prevent violence on animals. He succeeded in checking the practice.

The oral traditions that I have described here belong to south Gujarat, where I live. However, many people of the Kunkna community live in Maharashtra. I have not had the opportunity so far to study their life and literature. I apologize for the incomplete representation of the Kunkna community I have given here.

Dahyabhai Vadhu  
Ahwa

Translated from Gujarati by Avaneesh Bhatt



# **Kunkna Ramayan**





## ONE

The city was known as Opingpur. Opingdev was the name of the ruling king. He had taken the title of a 'king', but he lived the simple life of a layman like his subjects. Opingdev had seven sons. Six of them were healthy, but the youngest was physically handicapped. Opingdev's youngest one did not have arms and legs. He had only a torso and a head. The six sons, who were strong and capable, were married. They worked to earn their livelihood and supported their handicapped youngest brother. The youngest brother was called Ravan. He was dependent on his family. Though his family members took pity on Ravan, they insulted him every now and then. Since poor Ravan could not even move, he suffered every humiliation quietly. Where could he go? What could he do? He tolerated the insults hurled upon him by his brothers and their wives. Finally, the six brothers were tired of the useless Ravan and decided to get rid of him.

They went to their invalid brother and said, 'You better leave this home as soon as possible. Do whatever you want to do in life and take care of yourself. We can all work, but you can't. You must have committed grave sins in your previous birth; therefore God has punished you in the present *avatar*. Why should we put up with you? Go to Mahadev who has given you life. Ask him for hands and





legs. He will help you. Now, get out!’

Weeping like a child, poor Ravan pleaded to let him stay with them. But the brothers had teamed up against him; they did not want the incapable wretch in the family anymore. It was impossible for Ravan to walk out of the house because he had to turn over his body on the ground to move.

The brothers pushed Ravan’s body out of the house and as he started rolling on the *maidan* outside, his eyes filled with tears. For some time, Ravan kept his eyes closed and lay in the middle of the *maidan*, moaning in pain. After a while, he opened his eyes and looked at the bright, blue sky for the first time ever. He decided to go to Mahadev and began to roll himself. Disregarding all the stones, prickles, puddles and plants, Ravan kept turning over his awkward body even as he bled all over. ‘Let my body bleed, let there be cuts and injuries, anyhow I must reach Mahadev’s place,’ he said with determination.

Thus, rolling himself over and over, Ravan crossed the *maidan* for Holi, the outskirts of his village and the dark forest. Beyond the dark forest lay another forest. He crossed that too. The day passed; the sun set on the western horizon and the birds returned to their nests. At twilight, Ravan saw Mahadev’s shrine and in the shrine he saw Mahadev’s ling. Ravan began his penance and prayers. Days passed and nights passed. Ravan continued his worship for six long months.

From his seat at Dhavalegir, Mahadev was taking note of Ravan’s struggle. A powerless man had put up an impressive fight for his survival! At last Mahadev manifested himself before Ravan. Ravan recognized Mahadev and paid his respects to the god with his eyes.

‘What do you want, my child?’ Mahadev asked, ‘Tell me, what your wish is?’

‘I am Ravan, and I am observing this penance because I want a complete body,’ Ravan demanded.

Immediately, Mahadev picked Ravan and took him to







Dhavalegir.

The next day, Mahadev told Ravan that he had to go to earth to provide food to the birds and bees. He promised to give Ravan his missing limbs after he returned. Mahadev warned Ravan, ‘Till then, you must relax in this lighted room. Do not enter the dark room which I have kept closed. It is full of giant bees that will sting your eyes and make you blind. You do not have hands and legs to protect yourself from those bees. The dark room is a death-chamber for you. Do not even think of entering it.’

Ravan felt annoyed by these restrictions, ‘I came to Mahadev because my brothers had thrown me out. I observed penance for six months to please him, and now he keeps me waiting here for my missing limbs. I think it is better to die than to live like this. Mahadev himself has shown me the place where I can end my life. Let me go to that dark chamber and embrace death. Mahadev will be responsible for my death, and he will have to suffer the consequences. He will also learn a lesson and will not treat anyone else in this manner.’

Ravan rolled his body and went to the door of the dark room. He pushed open the door with his head. It was pitch black inside. He could not see anything in the dark room. Ravan did not feel scared of the darkness since he had decided to bring an end to his life. He rolled himself inside the room and in a moment his body fell down. He realized that he was in a well full of water! He started drowning. As he was sinking, Ravan started guzzling in the water of the well...once, twice, thrice...he swallowed nine swigs of water and a miracle happened! Nine heads sprang upon his shoulders and nine hands sprouted on either side of his body! Two legs grew where there were none! Ravan leapt to his feet and came out of the dark room. Mahadev was standing outside waiting for him.

‘I told you that I would give you hands and legs. Why did you act in haste? The well inside is full of *amrut*. Each mouthful you swallowed has given you a hand and a head,’ explained Mahadev.

Agitated, Ravan replied, ‘This is awful! I only wanted two arms





and legs.'

'I cannot do anything now,' said Mahadev.

'How will I live with such a body? How will I earn my livelihood?'

'I will give you the kingdom of Lanka, the golden city. From now onwards you will be called King Ravan!'

'King Ravan! It sounds wonderful! I like this! King Ravan! Ha, ha, ha...', Ravan was excited by the new status bestowed upon him.

With a monstrous body, Ravan left Mahadev's seat. Right at that time, Parvati was climbing the steps of Dhavalegir with a mud pot. She had gone to fetch water for the household. Ravan fell in love with the beautiful woman. He decided to demand the lovely woman as a gift from Mahadev. Besides, he knew that no woman would marry him because of his strange body.

Ravan returned to Mahadev, 'Ram Ram, Mahadev!'

'Ram, Ram! Why have you come back? What do you want now?' God enquired.

'I want something from you. You promised me that you would give me whatever I ask for.'

'Don't worry, I promise that I will grant your wish.'

'You will not go back on your word, will you?'

'No, I won't.'

'God, I am worried who will marry a man with ten heads and ten hands. Please help me out. Give me the woman who fetches water for you! Look, there she is! I like her. Give her away to me.'

Mahadev's head dropped in embarrassment. After pondering for some time, he went inside and dragged Parvati out of her room. He pushed his wife toward Ravan and asked him to take her away. Taking along the beautiful Parvati, Ravan rushed out of Mahadev's house.

The assembly of gods gathered in Dwarka was closely watching this drama. The grotesque-looking Ravan was taking away the





divinely beautiful Parvati. The gods were worried, how could they save Parvati from this unfortunate incident? After a long discussion, Narandev took the challenge of getting Parvati back to Dhavalegir. He said, 'I am going right away to complete this task. Until I return, no one should get up from his seat. If anyone tries to move, I will peel off his skin!'

Narandev took off his extravagant clothes and put on the simple clothes of a Bhil—a loincloth, a head dress and a coarse, sleeveless vest. Then he chanted a magical *mantra*, and in a moment, an old weak buffalo appeared next to him. Taking the buffalo with him, Narandev waited on the narrow path through which Ravan was to pass. Ravan appeared on the path, with Parvati following him meekly. The moment Ravan came close to him, Narandev requested, 'Ram Ram, brother! Would you please help me? This buffalo of mine has decided to sit here. I have been trying for some time but it just won't budge from this place.'

'Your buffalo has grown very old, brother,' Ravan observed.

'Well, you are right, brother. The buffalo is a gift from Mahadev. He has cheated me.'

'How did he cheat you?'

'I used to provide various items such as crabs and liquor to Mahadev. In return, he gifted this old sickly buffalo to me. It does not give milk. One has to be very careful while dealing with Mahadev. He is very clever in such matters.' Narandev put doubts in the mind of Ravan. Then he asked Ravan about Parvati, 'Brother, who is this woman?'

'I had observed penance for six months to please Mahadev. He then bestowed upon me these heads, hands and legs. Since I also asked for Parvati, he gifted her to me.'

Narandev started laughing, 'Dear brother, I have been visiting Mahadev for years. This woman is not Parvati. She is a maid in Mahadev's household. You better go back to Mahadev and check the facts.'





Narandev's words did the trick. Believing his story, Ravan rushed back to Mahadev's house.

Then, Narandev played another trick. He caught a female frog from a pond and turned her into a woman far more beautiful than Parvati. He named her Mandaldharini. He flew down to Dhavalegir and met Mahadev. Narandev showed him the beautiful woman created from a frog and explained his plan to Mahadev, 'When Ravan asks for this woman, you must immediately agree to his demand.'

The beautiful woman started moving around in Mahadev's house. Her body was far more attractive than Parvati's. She looked as bewitching as a newly wedded woman. She stood before Mahadev and looked into his eyes. Mahadev's single look made her pregnant with child.

Within no time, Ravan came running all the way. He shouted for Mahadev. Mahadev came out of his house. The new woman was standing right behind him. Ravan, still panting, said loudly, 'You have given me the wrong woman. She is not Parvati. She is your maid. I want Parvati. I know she is standing there, right behind you. Take this woman back and let me have Parvati.' Happily, Mahadev accepted Ravan's offer.

Once again, as Ravan was passing by the same narrow path, Narandev waited for him disguised as a bhil. Ravan thanked him for the advice. Narandev asked him, 'Where will you go from here?'

'I will go to Lanka. Mahadev has given it away to me. It is my kingdom now.'

'Brother, a kingdom is just for one life. You should have learnt the secret of your death. If you know how you are going to die, you can defeat death and live forever.'

So Ravan went back to Dhavalegir and enquired about the secret of his death. Mahadev called Saydev, who came with his record books and referred to Ravan's life. He said, 'King Dashrath rules over the city of Ayudha. When Dashrath completes twenty-one years, his wife will deliver a boy. The entire world will celebrate his birth.'





Even gods will sing in delight at the birth of the boy. The waters of the oceans will be churned nine times. At that moment, when everyone will be making merry, a fever will grip Ravan and he will shiver day and night. That boy, Dashrath's child, will one day kill Ravan.'

Ravan, having learnt of his death, stormed out of Mahadev's house. He was annoyed with the bhil who had given him the idea of enquiring about his death. When he went back, neither the bhil nor the sick buffalo was in sight. Dragging along the frog-woman and thinking about the little boy of Ayudha, Ravan started walking toward his Lanka.

On the way, they got tired and lay down to take rest beneath a tree on the banks of the river Panganga. Ravan was enjoying a siesta with his head resting on the lap of the frog-woman. In the river, the frogs were singing in hoarse voices. Mandaldharini, the pretty frog-woman, was also tired. She wanted to frolic in the river. She made a pillow of her saree, placed Ravan's head on it and went to the river to take a dip. Ravan woke up after sometime. When he did not see the woman, he got angry and started screaming loudly. The earth trembled, the river turned its course, small plants got uprooted and the frog-woman froze with fear. The embryo in her womb burst out and started floating in the river. The woman lost her glow and her face became gloomy. Trembling, she came out of the river and went to Ravan. He was surprised to see her dismal look and asked, 'Why do you look so dull? Did someone harass you?'

'Mahadev's child was in my womb. The unborn baby got flushed out when you screamed. That child would have done wonderful things for Lanka.'

Ravan immediately retorted, 'Why are you so worried about someone else's child? Why do you regret losing it? Forget about what has happened. We have a long life ahead and you will beget my baby.'





King Jambu's kingdom was on the bank of the river Panganga. Jambu, who was a gardener, lived with his wife in a small hut. The small hut had a fragile door made of cane. Unfortunately, Jambu's people, his gardens and his own life were barren. The plants in his gardens were flowerless, the trees were fruitless and the people childless.

Close to Jambu's city, a small dam was built on the Panganga river. People used the dam to fetch drinking water. The embryo of Mahadev's child that had flushed out of the frog-woman, floated across the dam and through a small canal, drifted into the garden of King Jambu. It reached the garden at about midnight. The moment it reached the garden, a miracle happened. All the gardens bloomed. The sweet fragrance of the fruits and flowers filled the air of Jambu's kingdom.

King Jambu, who was in a deep sleep, dreamt that his gardens and his people had become fertile. He woke up and told his wife about the strange dream. He wanted to go to the gardens and check if his dream was true. His queen was annoyed by his childish talk, 'Go to sleep and enjoy your dreams and let me sleep too.' However, Jambu was determined to visit the gardens. He prepared to leave his wife in bed. The queen saw this and thought that her husband had gone crazy. She asked him to wait for a while. Then, to cure the king of his madness, she heated the blade of a plough and seared his buttocks with it. Jambu could not bear the pain and fainted. When Jambu did not get up even after a while, the queen got scared. She thought her husband had died because of the treatment of madness she had given him!

'How can I spend the night with a dead body?' the queen thought. So she called four servants to take away the dead king. She tied four rotlas around the king's waist and asked the servants to cremate his body on the bank of the river. When the servants reached the river Panganga, the cool refreshing wind revitalized the king. He opened his eyes and started to speak. Thinking that the king's body was





under the influence of an evil spirit, the servants dropped the king and ran away. The king saw the pyre and understood what the queen had done. He remembered his beautiful dream. Thinking of the wonderful vision, he went to see his gardens. The orchids were full of fruits and the gardens were blooming with colorful flowers. Jambu was thrilled to see this.

While Jambu was excitedly feeling the fresh flowers and fruits, he heard a child crying. Jambu went in the direction of the voice and looked for the baby. After following the voice for some time, the king saw a beautiful new-born baby girl lying in the furrows of a field. He looked around to see if the guardian of the child was around. He found no one around and wondered, 'Whose child could this be? Who has abandoned such a beautiful girl? Her parents could be farmers. They could be Bhil-Warlis.' Jambu picked the girl and started stroking her. The little girl stopped crying and smiled sweetly at Jambu. Jambu took her home.

Jambu called out to his wife to show her the baby. The queen was surprised to see the king. 'How come he is here? Within a few hours the dead Jambu has turned into a ghost!' The queen did not open the door. Jambu understood that the queen was perplexed to see him. He pushed open the cane door and went inside with the baby. Jambu narrated everything to the frightened queen. The queen was too bewildered to understand this bizarre story. At last, after the king's patient efforts, the queen calmed down.

The king and queen decided to raise the girl as their own daughter. They put on an act for the people. The queen went into hiding and Jambu started on the daily chores. Whenever someone asked him about the queen, he replied, 'My wife is pregnant with a child. As I don't have servants, I do all the household work and take care of the queen.' After a week, he announced that the queen had delivered a baby girl!

Since the little girl was found in a furrow, Jambu named her Sita, which means 'a furrow'. Sita brought fertility to the kingdom.





The women of the city gave birth to healthy children and everyone became prosperous.

It was the day of Akhatrij. The women of the village prepared *gaurai*. The women of the surrounding cities had gathered on the banks of the Panganga for celebrating Akhatrij. Little girls started playing games with shells and slivers of a mud-pot. Sita was also among the girls playing there. While playing, Sita kicked a piece of stone that flew off and hit the forehead of another girl. She started bleeding. This injured girl belonged to the kingdom of King Janak. All the women from Janak's city got together and started quarrelling with Sita. They were in a large number, more than three hundred in all. Yet Sita, all alone, argued with them and eventually fought them. She even beat up a few of the cantankerous women. The women of Janak's kingdom ran away in fear.

King Janak learnt about this. He was surprised, 'How can a little girl fight with more than three hundred women?' He wanted to see this girl. Janak called his soldiers and prepared to visit the city of King Jambu. When King Jambu learnt about Janak's visit, he became anxious, for he did not know how to fight a battle. He hid Sita in his house and then went to meet Janak.

'Jambu! A girl of your city has beaten the women of my kingdom. I have come here to punish her. Bring that girl to me. If you won't do as I say, you will have to fight a battle with me,' Janak was angry.

Jambu replied in a trembling voice, 'King Janak! Something must have happened while they were playing. Why should we elders bother ourselves about children's quarrels?'

'I am not bothered about the quarrel but about the girl and her strange power. How could this girl fight with more than three hundred women? Now go and get the girl. I want to see her!'

Jambu called all the girls of Sita's age and asked Janak to identify her, 'These are all the little girls that live in my city. Which one are you looking for?'







The women of Janak's city said that Sita was not among the girls standing there.

'Jambu, you have hidden that girl. If you don't present her, my soldiers will behead you.'

At last, Jambu brought Sita.

'Yes! This girl had beaten us!' exclaimed the women of Janak's kingdom.

King Janak kept gazing at Sita. He was drawn to her as if she was his own child. The childless Janak desired to adopt Sita.

'Jambu, I wish to adopt this girl. Give her away to me.'

'How can I do so? Sita is our life. Without her, everything is meaningless. Be kind to us King Janak, I cannot give away my daughter to you,' Jambu said in a choking voice.

'If you won't give Sita to me, I will kill you and take her away.'

Jambu had to succumb to Janak's threats. Janak adopted Sita and took her to his kingdom.



King Dashrath ruled over the city of Ayudha. His queen was Gorilakshmi. Dashrath had two sisters. Janaka, the elder sister, was married to Janak; Rukhmaibai, the younger one, was married to Vasudev, the forest-dweller.

Dashrath learnt that Janak, his brother-in-law, had adopted a girl who possessed miraculous powers. He wanted to see the girl. So he began preparations to visit his sister's place. Dashrath put on new attire, took his bow of five hundred kilograms and a couple of arrows weighing sixty kilograms each. Dashrath left for Ayudha. He crossed the maidan for Holi, passed the outskirts of the city and crossed the cattle pastures. Traveling through forests, he at last reached the kingdom of Janak. When Queen Janaka heard about his arrival, she rushed out to receive her dear brother. King Janak also came out. Keeping aside his bow and arrows, Dashrath started chatting with





Janak.

Janaka prepared delicious dishes, making generous use of milk and butter. Both the kings paid respects to their teachers, kept a few grains aside for ants and insects and then started to enjoy the sixteen delicacies served to them.

In the meanwhile, Sita arrived and asked Janak, 'Father, I want to play with a stick. Do you have one? I want to make a horse of the stick and ride on it.' Janaka, busy talking, asked her to look around for a wooden stick. Searching for a toy-stick, Sita came upon Dashrath's bow and arrows lying in a corner. She picked them up and started playing with them as if they were toys.

Janaka and Dashrath finished eating. Janaka prepared pungent, mouth-freshening *paans* which they chewed for a long time. It was time for Dashrath to leave for home. When he went to collect his bow and arrows, the weapons were not in their place. The bow weighing five hundred kilograms and arrows of sixty kilograms each had been stolen!

'Brother! Where are my weapons? Where have you kept them?' Dashrath asked King Janak.

'I have no idea. They must be somewhere in the house,' replied Janak.

They rummaged through every corner in the house but could not find the bow and arrows. Who would steal such heavy weapons and why?

Janak sent his servants to the city. They beat drums to call out to people and asked them to gather at Janak's house. The King asked his subjects about the weapons. But they too did not know about the lost bows and arrows, 'Why would we take them? We don't require such weapons. Besides, they are too heavy to carry away easily. We can't even pick them up!'

Janak was embarrassed. A theft in the house of the king? Moreover, the thieves had taken away the belongings of a guest!





Sita, who was playing with her friends, saw that a crowd had gathered at her house. Assuming that there must be a snake charmer showing his tricks or that a folk drama was going on, she became curious and ran to join the crowd of people. She was carelessly dragging the bow which was a 'horse' for her play, and holding the arrows as if they were merely straws.

'Father! What is going on here? Have acrobats come to our city? Or is a snake charmer around?' Sita went and asked her father.

'No, dear daughter, your uncle's bows and arrows have been stolen. I have called all the people here to ask if they have seen the weapons or the thief who has stolen them,' replied Janak.

'Are you looking for these toys?' Sita waved the bow and arrows, 'I picked them up to play games.'

King Dashrath was aghast, 'God! How can a girl as little as Sita pick up such heavy weapons? And she is handling them as if they are toys made of mud!'

'Yes Sita, we are looking for these bow and arrows.'

Dashrath and Janak could not utter a word. Then Dashrath advised Janak, 'This girl is indeed extraordinary. She is not an ordinary mortal. Otherwise, how can she be so strong at this age? You will have to marry her to a man who can match her in strength.'

Where could one look for a man suitable for Sita? Dashrath elaborated on Sita's wedding, 'When Sita is of marriageable age, invite suitable boys from regions all over the world and arrange a contest. Dig a pit twelve feet wide, fill it with pieces of cloth and wood and burn them. Then place on the fire, a vessel twelve feet large, and fill it with oil. Above the vessel, hang a sparrow. When the oil starts boiling challenge the young men to stand on the edge of the container and ask them to pierce the sparrow with a bow and arrow. If a man can hit the sparrow, ask him to take seven dips in the hot oil, eat a pungent betel leaf and burn a forest by spitting on its vegetation. The man who is able to accomplish all these difficult tasks will deserve Sita.'





Janak promised Dashrath that he would follow his advice and find a suitable match for Sita by holding a competition as he had described.



## Two

An ascetic and his wife lived in a forest. The ascetic had twelve teachers and his wife had fourteen such mentors. They had spent most of their time studying big books and various skills. They did not have children. Once they went to god and asked for children.

‘God! We have spent our life in acquiring knowledge. Now we wish to have children. Please tell us how we can beget children.’

God called Saydev with his book. Saydev referred to the book and narrated what was written, ‘So long as this couple lives as human beings they cannot have children.’

‘Then what can they do to have children?’

‘They have to live as a deer and a doe in the forest and look for *sivana*, a rare wild fruit. As soon as they eat that fruit they will experience sexual passion. If they make love at an appropriate moment they will have a beautiful child.’

The ascetic couple returned to their hut. By the power of their penance they turned themselves into a deer and a doe and started hunting for the rare, wild fruit. One day, they came upon the *sivana* tree and started eating its fruits. They ate the fresh fruits which immediately excited them. The deer and the doe began to make love.

In the same forest lived Rukhmai with her husband, Vasudev. Sravan was their son and Changona was Sravan’s wife. Vasudev,





who loved eating meat, was roaming in the forest, looking for a good kill. From afar he saw a deer but he could not see the doe. He had no idea what the couple was doing. Vasudev prepared his bow and shot an arrow to kill the deer. His arrow did not miss its target and in a moment the deer, who had mounted his doe, collapsed on the ground. The frightened doe jumped in fear and saw her deer tossing about on the ground, breathing his last. She looked around and saw Vasudev running toward his prey, brandishing his killer weapons. When she saw Vasudev, she let out a wail and cursed, 'You wicked man! You killed my mate while we were making love! Couldn't you wait till I had received his seeds? What kind of a hunter are you? Don't you know the ethics of your profession? Because of the sin you have committed, you will suffer. I curse you that when the next time you make love to your wife, you both will become blind.'

Vasudev cared neither about the doe nor about her curse. He made a rope of dhamana's branch and tied the dead deer with it. Then he placed the dead deer on his shoulders and made off for his home. That night everyone in Vasudev's family enjoyed the deer's tasty meat. While relishing the food not even once did they think about the doe lamenting in the forest.

It was midnight. Vasudev and Rukhmai came close to each other and enjoyed their intimate moments. They woke up after a few hours but it was still dark everywhere. Thinking that the sun had not risen yet, they went to sleep once again. After a few more hours they opened their eyes and tried to move about in the house. It was still dark everywhere. Birds were chirping outside but it was still night. The curse had become a reality!

Vasudev held his wife's hand and they both started crying. Sravan and Changona rushed to them and asked them the reason for their sorrow. When Vasudev narrated what had happened, Sravan started weeping. But Changona thought, 'They have grown old and do not want to do any work. Sitting at home, they wish to eat well without taking any trouble. The old couple has put on an act of turning





blind.'

Shravan started helping his parents in their daily chores but they refused his help, 'We will have to learn to work without sight. Please don't try to help us.'

Vasudev said, 'My son, you may do us a favour. We like to eat fresh meat. The forest has many animals whose flesh we enjoy eating. Now onward, you must take up the task of hunting. Go to the forest, get a good kill and ask your wife to prepare a delicious meal.'

Since that day Shravan started hunting in the forest. His parents and Changona stayed back at home. He gave strict instructions to his wife, 'Changona, my dear wife, take good care of my parents. As I have to wander in the jungle all day long, my old, blind parents are under your care at home.'

Changona replied warmly, 'Don't worry, my husband, I am here to serve them whenever they need me.'

However, in the absence of her husband, Changona did not prepare fine food for the old couple. She served them rotlas made of husks and kept rotlas prepared from *nachani* for herself and her husband. Instead of meat, she would serve them bones and eat the delicious flesh with her husband. For Vasudev and his wife, good food had become a memory of the good times they had lived earlier.

Shravan suspected that his wife was not serving any meat to his parents. Once he decided to see what happened in the house after he left. He said to his wife, 'I am going out hunting. I will return late at night.' But instead of going to the forest Shravan hid behind the house and waited to listen to the conversation between Changona and his parents.

At lunch time, while eating the dry, tasteless rotlas, Vasudev remarked to Changona, 'I can't chew these rotlas made of husk. Can't you give us rotlas made of *nachani*?'

'Why should I? Have you done any work today? Do you bring grain to the house? Look, eat what I have given you and go to sleep





quietly,' Changona replied rudely.

Sravan was shocked to hear this. He came out of hiding and started beating his wife. Vasudev pleaded his son to stop, 'Dear son, we are left with just a few days to live. You have a long life ahead; please don't quarrel with your wife.'

But Sravan was angry. He hung his wife upside down, flung her body in the air and cursed her, 'You have harassed my old, blind parents. You will now have to live as a bat that hangs itself upside down on the trees.'

Sravan apologized to his parents and asked what he could do to repent. Vasudev made a wish, 'My son, we wish to go on a pilgrimage to Kashi.'

Immediately, Sravan went to a basket maker. He asked the basket maker to make two big cane baskets. He then tied the baskets to a bamboo stick. Sravan asked his parents to sit inside the baskets and then, carrying their weight on his shoulders, he started his journey to Kashi.

The pilgrimage to Kashi was considered holy in those days and if one took one's parents on the pilgrimage, it became a divine act. The moment Sravan began his pious journey, the earth started to tremble. The gods held a discussion, 'If Sravan completes his pilgrimage we will have to assign him the status of a god, and he will have the right to hold a seat in Dwarka.' This was impossible since Dwarka was now teeming with gods, without a single vacant seat! Now, only one option remained, which was to discontinue Sravan's journey. Only then the earth would stop trembling and Sravan would not attain the status of god. The assembly of gods planned to pose hurdles in Sravan's path.

The gods called Suryadev, the Sun God, and asked him, 'With what power are you shining at the moment?'

'At present, I am using twenty-four units of my power, but I can go up to thirty-six units.'







‘Good. Radiate your heat using all your power in the forest where Sravan is walking with his parents.’

Sravan was making his way through the forest, talking about something interesting to entertain his parents once in awhile. Suddenly, the atmosphere changed and everything became bright with sunlight. It seemed as if the sun had come down on the earth! The path became so hot that Sravan developed blisters on his feet. Ignoring the heat and the blisters, Sravan kept walking. After sometime, his parents asked for water but he did not have a drop of water in his water bag. It did not seem likely that he would come across a river or a pond on the way. The heat was so scorching that even a puddle would have become dry.

At last Sravan stopped and put the sling aside. The earth stopped trembling. Sravan climbed a tree to see if he could see signs of water around. North, south and east, every direction looked dry. But on the western side, he could see the glowing surface of water! Sravan hung the sling on a tree so that his blind parents would remain safe from wild animals. Then taking a bowl, he went in the direction of water. On the way, he left trails of stones and signs so that he could get back to his parents without delay.



### THREE

Ahalya was the daughter of Mahadev and Parvati who lived in Dhavalegir. She was of marriageable age. Her parents had decided that Ahalya's husband should be equal to Mahadev in strength and intelligence. To find a match with such qualities, Parvati announced, 'Ahalya will marry the man who can travel around the entire earth in a day. Anyone, a king or a layman, can compete to win Ahayla as his wife.'

Everyone was talking about the competition. People from far and wide reached Dhavalegir to either participate in the event or to witness it.

Gautam, the great sage, lived in a quiet forest. He had observed a penance for twenty-four years. When he heard about the competition for Ahalya's wedding, he thought, 'Let me visit Dhavlegir. Many people will come there and I will get to see all kinds of people. I have not seen a crowd of people in a long time. I might get to learn something from them.' So Gautam too headed for Dhavalegir.

Devbahola, the divine cow, was also ambling to Dhavalegir. Gautam, who was walking absent-mindedly, overtook Devbahola without paying respects to her. The cow was a little annoyed by this loin-cloth wearing sage, and thought of playing a mischief, 'I should





play a trick and marry off this sage to Ahalya. Mahadev will be humiliated and the wedding will become an amusing event.'

Devbahola called out to the sage, 'Gautam, you seem to be in a hurry. You did not even pay your respects to me. Are you so keen to marry Ahalya that you ignored me altogether? You burn my dung to smear your body with ash and then you don't even look at me when you meet me on the way! What kind of a sage are you?'

'No, no, mother! Since I was lost in my own thoughts, I did not notice you. Are you too going to the same place?'

'Yes, I am going to Dhavalegir. Gautam, will you do me a favour?'

'Definitely, I will do as you say even if it is impossible to accomplish the task.'

'It is a simple task, not a difficult one.'

Devbahola asked the sage to make a pot and a few lamps of clay. Then she gave her milk to the sage and asked him to put the leaves of a wild plant in it to make curds and ghee. Devbahola and the sage also grew a cotton plant, picked the cotton from it and twirled it into wicks.

'Let us now go to Dhavalegir. But we will go separately, not together. You should take the lamps to the competition. When we are there you must keep looking at me. As and when I give you a nod, light the lamps and worship those present by circulating the lamps in front of them. Then immediately walk around those eminent competitors and pay them your respects. You will have to do this for me, it is my command.'

Gautam and Devbahola reached the place of the competition by their separate ways. Mahadev welcomed everyone and announced that the brave man who travelled around the entire earth in one day would get to marry Ahalya. The Sun and the Moon, who were also among the competitors, thought that only they were capable of accomplishing this task.

Devbahola made a gesture to Gautam when all the competitors





had gathered to begin the race to go around the earth. In the meanwhile, Gautam finished his prayers and walked around the assembly of people. Everyone wondered what the thin, half naked ascetic was doing. But before they could understand the actions of Gautam, Devbahola announced, 'Ahalya should be married to this ascetic because he is the winner of this competition. He worshipped you all and then walked around you. People have gathered here from around the world and so this assembly is the symbol of the whole earth.'

All the competitors were forced to accept this argument. Ahalya was married to the loin-cloth wearing ascetic, Gautam. Gautam brought his newly-wedded wife to his hut in the forest.

The Sun and the Moon had come to Dhavalegir with the hope of marrying Ahalya. Bitter with disappointment, they were angry with Mahadev, Devbahola and Gautam. The sage had married Ahalya by playing a trick, so now the Sun and the Moon also planned a cunning scheme to take revenge. They decided to corrupt Ahalya.

Sage Gautam had vowed that he would enjoy sexual intercourse only once in his life. The precious moment of love was now close. Ahalya prepared a variety of delicacies. She wore beautiful new clothes. Gautam sat down to have his evening meal. After paying respects to his teachers, he set aside a few grains for insects and a few morsels for gods, and then began to relish the delicious food. Waiting for midnight, Gautam and Ahalya lay down on the bed and chatted happily. The hour of midnight, the time of sin and pleasure arrived. They prepared themselves for the passionate moments of love.

The Sun and the Moon were hiding behind Gautam's hut. The wily duo had made their plan: when Gautam would try and penetrate Ahalya, the Moon would give a cock's cry. Believing it was dawn, Gautam would leave Ahalya. At that moment they would enter the hut and violate Ahalya.

Ahalya and Gautam knew how ephemeral their pleasure was going to be. Since Ahalya knew that her husband was going to be





intimate with her only once, that night was important for her. The moment Gautam tried to enter into Ahalya, the cock crowed! Gautam leapt up, picked up his loin cloth and rushed to the river Gautamiganga for his morning bath. Ahalya pleaded with him to stay close to her but he did not bother about his wife. He was more worried about his morning ablutions.

As soon as Gautam left the hut, the Sun took the form of a man and went to Ahalya. He was eager to make love to Ahalya and make her impure. Ahalya was tossing about in bed, excited and unsatisfied. Her single moment of receiving her husband's love had been lost. It was a delicate moment and Ahalya succumbed to the Sun without resistance.

Gautam went to the river and started washing his body. The river goddess asked angrily, 'Who is this fool taking a bath at midnight?'

'Mother, I am Gautam!'

'Gautam, don't you know the time? This is not the time when you take a bath!'

'But I heard a cock's cry!'

'Well, what you heard may not have been a cock's cry. Go now, rush back to your hut and see if Ahalya is safe. She is all alone.'

It was now the Moon's turn to enjoy Ahalya's body. Before the Moon could enter the hut, Gautam reached close to his home. From outside, the Sun saw the sage running toward the hut and warned the Moon. The Moon hastily came out of the hut. Realizing what had happened, Gautam hit the moon with his loin-cloth. The Moon's body got blotched because of the wound. The Sun and the Moon escaped with great difficulty.

Ahalya, who was innocent in this whole incident, was shocked when she learnt of what had happened. She was so perturbed that she lost her speech and memory. She became lifeless like a statue. Ahalya's body followed the natural course and after nine months,





she delivered a baby girl. The girl was named Anjana.

By the time Anjana became mature, she had inculcated a fear for men. She started to hate her body. 'A woman's lower body is a cause of suffering,' she thought. One day, she buried herself up to the waist in the earth and began to meditate.



## FOUR

King Dashrath ruled over the city of Ayudha. Gorilakshmi was his queen. They did not have a child. It was a time when they would have loved to have a little one playing in their lap, but they were not fortunate to enjoy benefit of such pleasure. One day, King Dashrath visited Dwarka, the seat of god.

‘Welcome, mighty King Dashrath! Oh great fighter, tell me, how can I help you?’ god asked.

‘God, every insect and every beast gives birth to its kind. Among human beings, the lame and the blind also have children, but I don’t have a child. Please do justice to me and tell me how I can have descendants.’

God called Saydev and asked him to look into Dashrath’s future. Saydev referred to his books and declared, ‘King Dashrath can have a child only if he kills three animals, two males and one female in the single shot of an arrow!’

Dashrath was an expert in the craft of archery. Although he was an excellent hunter, it would still be difficult to kill three animals, two males and one female, in one shot of an arrow. Dashrath resolved to achieve this feat.

The next day he went hunting in the quiet forest. He did not see many birds or beasts that day. He thought, ‘Let me go to a pond.





I am sure animals will come to drink water there.’ Dashrath went to the milky pond in the forest and waited for animals to come.

It so came to pass that Sravan, who wanted to fetch water for his parents, came to the same pond. He was glad to see the milky pond because his parents were thirsty. ‘Let me fill the bowl with water and quickly go back to my parents,’ he decided. Sravan dipped the bowl in the pond. Water filled the bowl with a gurgling sound. Dashrath, who was hiding behind a tree, thought that the gurgling noise was that of an animal drinking water. Sravan was also thirsty but he wanted to first offer water to his parents and so he dipped the bowl in the water once again. When Dashrath heard the gurgling once again, he became sure that there was more than one animal drinking water. He felt so excited that without bothering to see which animals were at the pond, he shot an arrow.

A human voice cried aloud, ‘Oh mother! Oh father! This pond and this jungle have become our Kashi... forget everything else now... I lie here...’

Dashrath was terrified to hear this and immediately rushed to see the victim of his arrow. He was appalled to see a young man breathing his last. When he figured out that the dying man was his nephew, Sravan, he almost fainted, ‘Oh god, I have killed my sister Rukhmai’s son! What have I done?’

‘Uncle! You brought an end to my pilgrimage to Kashi,’ said Sravan weakly. Then he advised Dashrath, ‘Now don’t waste your time regretting my death. Take this bowl of water and following the trails I have left behind, reach my parents in the forest. They are thirsty. Give them water to drink. My blind parents are sitting in a sling. Offer water to my mother and my father. Tell them of my death only after they have quenched their thirst because they won’t be able to drink water when they learn of my death.’

Dashrath started crying, ‘What sins I must have committed in my previous birth! I have killed my sister’s son so that I can have a child! Even god will not pardon my offence!’







Taking the bowl and leaving behind Sravan's quivering body, Dashrath walked into the forest. He could not see anything through the mist of warm tears in his eyes. 'How will I face my sister and narrate what has happened?' he started sobbing.

Luckily, Sravan had made trails that Dashrath could follow in the dense forest. From afar he saw the sling hanging on a tree. His feet became heavy and he could not walk. Every passing moment made it more difficult for him to face Sravan's parents.

At last Dashrath made up his mind to go to his sister and her husband. He kept the bowl to the lips of Sravan's mother, but Rukhmai turned her head away and said, 'Dear son, you went to fetch water in the scorching sun. You must be tired. Thorns must have stung your feet. Are your feet bleeding?' Dashrath did not reply. 'Are you angry with us? Tell me, my son, talk to me first, then alone will I drink the water,' Rukhmai insisted.

Dashrath stifled his sobs. Now he turned to Vasudev, Sravan's father, and offered him water. Vasudev too gave the same answer as his wife! Dashrath could bear this no longer and started weeping!

Rukhmai recognized her brother's voice. She asked, 'Where is my son, brother? Why have you brought us water? Where is Sravan?'

Dashrath narrated the sad story. Rukhmai and Vasudev started crying. Their sorrow was so pathetic that it seemed every tree of the forest had become miserable.

'You are a sinner, Dashrath! Now take this sling and take us to our son,' said Rukhmai with anger and then cursed her brother, 'You too will soon meet your death! A nephew is believed to be an incarnation of god! And you killed your nephew! You murderer!'

Dashrath lifted the sling and walked into the forest. Sravan was still clinging to his last breath. Dashrath put Sravan's head in Rukhmai's lap. Weeping, she said to Dashrath, 'Now prepare three pyres. How shall we live without our dear son? We will join Sravan on his last journey.'





Dashrath prepared three pyres. Rukhmai and Vasudev sat on the pyres and Sravan's body lay in their laps. From the pyre Rukhmai cursed her brother, 'Dashrath! You wanted to kill one female and two male animals with one arrow. You have achieved what you wanted. Now that you have taken our lives, you will have a son. Your wife will die on the twelfth day of your son's birth. Name your son Ram. He will be an epitome of truth and good conduct, but jealous family members will send him to the forest to gain political power. When Ram leaves the palace, you will understand the agony of losing a son. Following your son Ram, you will come to this place and Ram will turn around to look at you. That one look of your dear son will take your life. While dying, you will experience what we are suffering now...'

Sravan uttered his last broken words, 'Uncle Dashrath, pull out the arrow from my chest, I can no longer bear the pain!'

The moment Dashrath pulled out the arrow, Sravan breathed his last and immediately, Rukhmai and Vasudev too collapsed and died. Thus, Dashrath killed two males and one female with a single arrow.

Wallowing in grief, Dashrath went back to Dwarka and narrated the incident to God. God consoled him, 'Whatever happened was destined. Now you should perform rituals to assuage the souls of your dead relatives. Make nine small balls of wheat flour and float them in a river. Pick up the wheat balls which float against the flow of the river because they will have the power to make a woman pregnant with a child. The woman who eats any one of these wheat balls will conceive a child.'

King Dashrath came to a river. He put nine wheat balls into the flowing waters. While six of them drifted away in the river, three wheat balls moved against the flow of the river. Dashrath picked the three balls and returned to Ayudhya.

A hawk in search of food was hovering in the sky. When it saw the wheat balls in the hands of Dashrath, the hawk swooped down





and picking up one of the balls, flew away in the sky. After clutching the wheat ball in its claws for a while the hawk dropped it on the earth.

Having buried her lower body in the earth, Ahalya's daughter, Anjana, was meditating in the forest. At that moment, she completed her meditation and cupped her hands to seek the blessings of God. The wheat ball slipped out of the hawk's claws and dropped in Anjana's hands. She thought it was God's gift and ate it! Because of this she conceived a child. Since half her body was still buried in the earth she could not bear the child like other women. One day, a strong blow of wind pushed her child out through her right ear. This child was named Hanuman.



Ravan, the king of Lanka, was scared that the son of Dashrath would come any time to kill him. So Ravan called his brother, Vibhisan, to stay with him. Saydev's prediction was clear—when Dashrath would turn twenty-one, his wife will bear a son and that son will kill Ravan! Ravan often had scary thoughts because Dashrath was now twenty years old.

Ravan made a plan. If he could confine Dashrath to a room for one full year, the king of Ayudha could not be intimate with a woman during that time and therefore would not become a father. This ploy would make Ravan immortal! But how was he to push Dashrath into confinement? Dashrath was a brave man and a formidable enemy. Yet, he could be imprisoned by a trick if not by force.

King Ravan sent a note to Dashrath, 'You are a great king, but I am a novice at statecraft. If you can pay a visit to Lanka and instruct me about important aspects of administration, it will help me in handling my affairs well. Please come to Lanka as soon as possible.'

Dashrath was happy to learn that Ravan, a mighty king, wanted to learn about statesmanship from him. But his wife, Gorilakshmi,





warned him, ‘Don’t you think a student should come to his teacher? The student who demands a visit from his teacher is a cheat! If you wish to visit Lanka, you may do so, but please take your weapons along and when you are there, be on your guard to defend yourself!’

‘My dear wife! I am not going to a battle. I am going to meet Ravan and instruct him about statecraft. I will not bear weapons on my body when I am visiting someone as a teacher.’

Dashrath went to Lanka. The moment Ravan saw him he disbanded the assembly of his courtiers and took Dashrath to a small, lonely house, ‘We need to be at a quiet place so that you can instruct me well. No one will disturb us here.’

Dashrath found this a bit strange. After a while, Ravan suggested that they should go and have lunch. He took Dashrath into a small room where Ravan’s wife served them lunch and then left the house. Ravan started eating but in the middle of the meal he suddenly announced, ‘I want to eat some pickle. I will bring it from the kitchen.’ He left Dashrath all by himself. Dashrath finished eating but Ravan, his host, did not return. Dashrath came out of the small room and found that the house was locked from the outside and it was impossible to escape! He was a prisoner of Ravan, the king of Lanka!

Ravan, now sure that Dashrath would not have a son, became confident of becoming immortal. He turned into a tyrant and started invading neighboring states. He became so arrogant that he prepared to attack Dwarka, the seat of gods. ‘In no time, Dwarka will be part of my kingdom,’ he boasted. The lame boy, whom his brothers had insulted, was now a powerful king, uncontrollable in his aggression. Probably, this was a reaction to the wretched childhood he had spent.

The gods assembled and discussed ways to restrict Ravan. Dashrath was capable of defeating the cruel and oppressive king of Lanka, they concluded. But where was Dashrath? No one had any idea of his whereabouts. Narandev was summoned and assigned the task of finding Dashrath, the mighty king.

Narandev went to Ayudha and met Gorilakshmi. She informed





him that Dashrath had gone to see Ravan and had not returned from Lanka. Narandev knew how Ravan was going to die. So he assumed that Ravan must have invited Dashrath to Lanka under the pretext of learning statecraft, and then hidden him somewhere. Narandev rushed to Lanka.

For a few days Narandev moved around in disguise to learn where Dashrath was hidden. Narandev saw that Ravan visited a lonely house every evening with food. Narandev guessed that Dashrath must be locked inside that house. The next day, he stormed into the court of Ravan and shouted, 'Who is the king here? Where is the real king of Lanka?'

Ravan replied, 'Hey! Are you blind? Look! The king is at his throne, where else would he be?'

'Is this the king? I have seen him serving food to King Dashrath every evening. I don't think a servant can claim to be a king. This man who is sitting at the throne looks after and obeys Dashrath, the King of Ayudha.'

Ravan was taken aback, 'How does this man know about Dashrath? He even knows that I serve meals to Dashrath everyday! How? He seems to possess mysterious powers. Let me talk to him.' Ravan dissolved his court and invited Narandev for a private talk.

'King Ravan, I am Narandev. I am tired of serving the gods in Dwarka. You are the next king of the world! I know you have the power to rule over the earth. Let us invade Dwarka and defeat the gods. Dwarka will be a part of Lanka. Then you will be the king and I will be your minister.'

Ravan was glad to find an ally, 'Yes! You are right! Let us prepare to attack Dwarka.'

'And we should eliminate all our enemies. Why should we be merciful to those who could be a threat to us? Dashrath can be our opponent tomorrow, so let us kill him today. Why do you nurture a rival?'





‘Narandev, I have nothing against Dashrath. I don’t want to kill him. I have confined him for one year so that he does not become a father at the age of twenty-one.’

‘What you say is right, but then you will have to attend to him like a servant for one full year.’

Finally, on Narandev’s insistence, Ravan agreed to kill Dashrath. Since Dashrath was physically a very powerful man, it was decided that no one should challenge him in a duel. They planned to put him in a cage inside which they could hit Dashrath with a mace, making him unconscious. Then they would throw him into the sea.

Thus they got a cage made and put it at the door of the lonely house in which Dashrath was kept captive. Then Ravan opened the door of the house. When Dashrath attempted an escape, he got trapped inside the cage. Then Narandev threw the cage into the sea.

After Dashrath’s death Ravan felt relieved. Narandev went back to Dwarka and undertook the task of rescuing Dashrath. He employed two ships to look for Dashrath’s body in the sea and kept two men ready with amrut. Gorilakshmi was also present at the sea shore. Thirty-six crore gods gathered in the sky along with nine lakh demons. As soon as Dashrath’s body was discovered, amrut was rubbed on it. Within a few minutes Dashrath woke up. Instead of the lonely house in Lanka, he saw Narandev and other gods greeting him and instead of the scary silence, he heard the stormy ocean around. His wife came to him in haste and embraced him but he could not meet her eyes. He had not paid heed to her advice of carrying weapons to Lanka and so he had suffered.

Narandev made a palace of fire for the king and the queen. Such was its design that only air could touch them. The wheat ball of fertility was brought over from Ayudha.

The queen decked herself with fineries. She cooked delicious food of six different varieties in milk and ghee. After paying respects to his teachers and the gods, the king ate till he felt satiated. Then the queen ate. Dashrath offered her the wheat ball which she gladly





ate. The couple lay on their bed. The hour of midnight, the time of love, arrived. The king and queen passionately made love. The queen conceived a child that night.

The galaxy of gods was waiting for the good tidings. The king and queen were living happily and the fetus in the queen's body grew gradually. Days passed, nights passed, weeks passed and then nine months and nine days passed by. The child stretched itself to emerge from the womb. Dwarka's midwife and the goddess of medicines came over to help Gorilakshmi in childbirth. The goddess of wealth came to write a bright future for the new-born.

The child, a son, saw the light of day. He started crying and all the deities, cheering loudly, began dancing with joy. The water of the oceans whirled nine times and in Lanka, Ravan trembled nine times. Every hair on his body stood up. He realized that his slayer had arrived in the world.

On the fifth day of the birth, people celebrated the child's arrival, and on the sixth day, the fate of the little boy was written. Since he was not an ordinary boy, his parents called him 'Ram', meaning 'truth and noble conduct'. Ram, the destined destroyer of Ravan, started growing up in the fire-palace right across Lanka.

In Lanka, Ravan lived in anxiety of imminent death, but he could do nothing about it since it was impossible to enter the fire-palace and kill Ram. Every king on the earth refused to help Ravan in destroying Ram, a young, harmless boy. Sheshnag, the king of the netherworld, was Ravan's friend. One day, Ravan went to him and sought his help. To convince Sheshnag, he said, 'I do not have an heir. Please give me one of your sons. I will adopt him and make him my heir.' Sheshnag agreed to this proposal and sent one of his sons with Ravan.

Ravan and the little son of Sheshnag came to Lanka, from where Ravan showed the boy the fire-palace. Ravan said, 'Look, that palace across the ocean is a fire-palace. An enemy of ours lives in it. You should enter the palace and kill our enemy because if he remains





alive, we will be unable to live for long.'

The cobra-boy came to the fire palace and looked for a hole or crevice through which he could enter the palace. A number of sentries were guarding the palace. It also had strong, high walls and as if this was not enough, fire flames provided protection from intruders. The cobra-boy turned into a tiny snake and protecting himself from the burning flames, he slithered inside the castle.

At that time, Gorilakshmi was giving a bath to Ram. It was an opportune moment to attack Dashrath's little son. The cobra-boy went close to Gorilakshmi and hid himself under her foot. When she started washing Ram's face, a few drops of water fell on the tiny cobra. At the first touch of water, the little cobra changed his mind, 'It seems Ravan has brought me here to kill Ram. Ravan did not even show me Lanka, and he claims that I am the heir of his kingdom! He sent me away to kill Ram before we even reached Lanka! Why should I commit such a deed? Why should I bite a noble soul like him? No, I don't want to kill such a virtuous boy!'

Gorilakshmi washed Ram's face once again, and again a few drops of water fell on the cobra. This time the slithering reptile turned into a human baby-boy! Ram's mother was amazed to see a baby boy lying at her feet. She called out to Dashrath, 'Look, my dear husband! A child is crying here!'

The king replied, 'He must be here with god's consent and blessings. We shall raise the son as our own. Ram will also have a companion in him. Let us name him Lakshman.'

Gorilakshmi kept Ram and Lakshman in the same cradle. She was happy to have two sons now, 'Our sons will achieve fame in the world and make us proud. They may not be brothers but we should treat them as such. We shall never treat Lakshman as a step-child.'

The gods of Dwarka and Dhavalegir went to their abodes. Indra and his companions returned to their court. Thirty-six crore gods and nine lakh demons were still around to help Dashrath reach Ayudha. When the festive procession reached Ayudha, the people of







Ayudha celebrated the event with great pleasure. The king now had two sons! The blind, the deaf and the mute—everyone delighted in the special occasion, forgetting their personal suffering. Then thirty-six crore gods and nine lakh demons left for their abodes.

Twelve days had passed since the birth of Ram. Dashrath and Gorilakshmi were enjoying every moment of their happiness. They now had an heir to the throne in Ram and one more son in Lakshman! But in the afternoon the queen seemed to be upset. Dashrath asked her if she was not well. She looked at the setting sun and said, 'I am feeling weak. It seems someone is calling me from afar. Everything appears so gloomy. Please don't leave me today. Stay by my side.'

At night, the queen slept in the middle, with Ram and Lakshman on each side. She woke up at midnight, went to Dashrath and said to him, 'Talk to me, my husband! I am feeling anxious. My heart is pounding heavily, and at times, I can't see anything!' Dashrath tried to console her but she spoke further of her anguish, 'Listen to what I say. If I die tomorrow, please do not get married again. A second wife does not care for the children of her husband's previous marriage. If you get married again, your second wife will be unfair to my sons. Please promise me that if I die, you will never marry again.'

'Gorilakshmi! This is nothing but madness! Why do you think that you will die? However, since you insist, I promise that I will not marry again if you pass away!'

The queen was satisfied with Dashrath's answer and lay quietly in her bed.

Saydev opened his book of destiny and read the day's schedule—the life of Gorilakshmi was to end today. Saydev called his demi-gods, Kal and Vel, who represented 'circumstance' and 'time' respectively. Then Saydev prepared an iron cage to place Gorilakshmi's soul. Kal and Vel came over to Ayudha.

Gorilakshmi was now content because Dashrath, her beloved





husband, had promised that he would not marry again after her death. Kal and Vel came close to Gorilakshmi's bed. Kal clamped his pincers which he used to draw out the soul of a person, on Gorilakshmi's foot. Her soul jumped to her knee. Kal placed the pincers on her thigh and immediately the soul skipped to her heart. The moment this happened, Gorilakshmi found it difficult to breathe. She started tossing around in her bed. Kal, determined to complete his task, touched Gorilakshmi's heart with the pincers. Gorilakshmi's soul leaped to her throat, and then from her throat, it went to her head. At last, when Kal put his pincers on Gorilakshmi's head, her soul was caught. Vel put the soul in the cage. Then Kal and Vel left Dashrath's palace. On their way, they fed Gorilakshmi's soul with the milk of goat and cow.

King Dashrath suddenly woke up from a deep sleep. He had had a disturbing dream. In the dream, he saw his wife, Gorilakshmi, going somewhere and while leaving, she requested him to take good care of Ram and Lakshman. Exactly at that moment, a strange bird flew down from nowhere, picked up Gorilakshmi in its beak and vanished into the sky! Dashrath tried very hard to rescue his wife but he could not even move from his place. And then he screamed! With this Dashrath woke up to see if his queen was well.

Dashrath saw that Gorilakshmi was sleeping peacefully in between her lovely sons. When he touched her hand, it was as cold as ice! Dashrath felt so frightened that he started to shiver. Then he tried to awaken Gorilakshmi but she did not open her eyes. Dashrath realized that his wife was dead.

Gorilakshmi's ominous words of the previous evening, the promise she had demanded from Dashrath and then what he had dreamt at night—these signs had indicated Gorilakshmi's death! How strange!

Dashrath wanted to cry but he could not do so! At a young age his wife had left him and this world, leaving behind two lovely sons. His sons were young, just twelve days old, and without anyone to





take care of them. Although his situation was sad and pitiable, Dashrath could not cry. He had become speechless! He remembered how he had cried at Sravan's death, but today his eyes, absolutely dry, were fixed at his dead queen and their two small sons. He kept gazing at his wife and thought that she would get up in an instant and say, 'Oh come on, O king! It was just a joke! Now come on, cheer up!' But nothing of the sort happened.

The sun rose, the servants came to the palace and learnt about the demise of the queen. Within a short time, the whole city had come to know about the queen's death. Everyone started crying, 'A child can grow up without its father, but never without a mother! How will the king raise his sons now? No child should receive such a fate! If the king brings a second wife, how she will treat these innocent boys?'

Gorilakshmi was cremated and all the rituals of death were performed appropriately. After some time the king's family requested him to get married again but Dashrath replied firmly, 'I had promised Gorilakshmi that I would never get married again if she died.'

Dashrath became completely involved in raising his two sons. He placed small morsels in their mouths, played and prattled with them endlessly.

This is how days, months and years passed by. Ram and Lakshman were now five years old. Their bond was strong and the brothers were inseparable.



## FIVE

Dashrath was sitting with his courtiers and some of his family members. On that day people tried to convince Dashrath that he should get married again, 'You have a long life to live. How long will you take care of the household chores? A woman will make things easier for you. She will support you during times of illness.'

The King pondered on their advice. What his people said was correct because he was finding it cumbersome to perform two important functions—raising his sons and running the kingdom. On occasions, he did not get time even to eat! Gorilakshmi was no more than a faint memory now. He had promised her that he would not get married again so that their sons would be taken care of. But even after getting married again, he could still be a good guardian to his sons. In fact, it seemed necessary to remarry for the health and happiness of Ram and Lakshman. After deliberating over the matter for a night, Dashrath decided that if he met either an unmarried woman or a woman who had separated from her husband, he would marry her.

The next day, after both his sons had eaten their lunch, Dashrath asked them to stay inside the palace, 'Play inside the palace today. I am going out and I will prepare food for you after I return in the evening.'





Dashrath left his palace but he did not know where to go. Eventually, he decided to go to Sendri, the king of a neighbouring state.

Midway, when he was crossing a forest, Dashrath met Kaykauchala, an old woman. She was picking up animal dung. She saw Dashrath and asked him, 'Hello, stranger! Where are you going?'

'I am looking for a spinster. I wish to get married,' the king replied.

'Look at me! I am a spinster.'

'No, no grandma! You are too beautiful to be my wife!'

Dashrath walked ahead. He met Kaykauchala again. She was sweeping dry tree-leaves scattered on the road. She put the same question to him, 'Hello stranger! Where are you going?'

'I am looking for a spinster. I want to get married,' the king replied.

Once again, she asked him to consider her as a bride, 'Look at me! I am a spinster!'

Throughout Dashrath's journey, Kaykauchala met him in various guises, once plucking flowers, collecting wood, then picking fruits, next driving a herd, and even making a journey, but the king managed to put her off.

Finally, Dashrath reached the kingdom of King Sendri. He went to Sendri's palace, greeted him and then they began to discuss various matters. Sendri asked Dashrath the purpose of his visit. Dashrath gave him an account of his life and said, 'Now, I feel lonely and think that I should get married to a single woman. I seek your help in arranging this wedding.'

Sendri gave an encouraging reply, 'I know of a spinster who lives in my kingdom. Let us go and ask her if she wishes to marry you. If she agrees to this alliance, we will perform the rituals immediately.'

Dashrath, Sendri and a few of Sendri's courtiers went to





Kaykauchala's house.

'Kaykauchala! Are you in?' Sendri asked from outside her house.

'Yes! I am very much at home. Why have you come to me?' Kaykauchala asked.

'Well, my dear friend Dashrath is looking for a single woman because he wants to get married. I have come to you with a marriage proposal. Are you ready for this marriage?'

'I would definitely agree to this but on one condition,' Kaykauchala said from inside her house.

'What is it?'

'I won't marry King Dashrath if he has children from his previous marriage,' Kaykauchala gave a firm answer without bothering to come out.

Dashrath heard this and became worried. He had found a suitable spinster with much difficulty. Now, if he spoke the truth about his sons he would lose the opportunity to get married. Though he never told lies, in this situation he found it impossible to avoid telling one.

'No, I don't have any children,' Dashrath replied in a soft voice and a sad look on his face.

'Then I don't mind getting married to you,' said Kaykauchala and then added, 'Let us complete the marriage formalities in King Sendri's presence. You are all like my family members.'

Upon hearing this, Sendri said to Dashrath, 'In keeping with the tradition, you need to make a payment to the bride's family, to me as I have come here as your friend and to the policeman of the village. Make all the necessary payments to the head of the village. Then Kaykauchala will be yours. Take her to Ayudha whenever you wish.'

Dashrath made the required payments and then announced that he would like to set out for Ayudha immediately. When all the formalities were over Kaykauchala came out.





When King Dashrath saw her, his throat became parched and he felt dizzy, 'This hag, who was picking up animal dung in the forest, will be my wife!'

But it was impossible to back out of the relationship now. Since all the rituals were over, how could he now say that he did not like the old woman? And if he did, Sendri would believe that Dashrath did not have integrity of character and must have treated many other women in the same manner.

So Dashrath said in a choked voice, 'Let us go to Ayudha. I have to worship my little gods.' He was trapped in a complex web from which it was no longer possible to get out and so he accepted his fate.

'When I met you in the forest I had told you that I was a spinster. You should have accepted my proposal then!' Kaykauchala taunted Dashrath. He started walking fast to avoid any conversation with her.

After reaching Ayudha, Dashrath said to Kaykauchala, 'This is our home. Cook fine food everyday and prepare two plates for my two little gods. First I offer food to them and only then do I eat. You will live in the house and I will live in the courtyard. This is how it will be.'

Everyday, Kaykauchala would prepare meals and set two plates for her husband's little gods. The king would take the plates to Ram and Lakshman and feed them. He had confined the two boys to a room. As soon as Kaykauchala went to sleep, Dashrath would spend time with his two sons.

One day Kaykauchala went to fetch water. She saw her reflection in the river water for the first time that day. She felt scared on seeing her wrinkled and withered face, 'Do I look so ugly? Is this my fate? No wonder the king does not pay attention to me!'

She prayed to Mahadev, 'God! Just look at me! I have never sinned, I have never harmed anyone, I have never committed adultery. I got married recently but my husband does not look at me. My ugly face is a hindrance in my married life. God, please help me





and gift me youth and beauty.'

Mahadev heard Kaykauchala's prayer and dropped some ash from his body. The ash fell on Kaykauchala's body and in an instant turned her into a beautiful girl. Kaykauchala was no longer a hag but an eighteen year old attractive girl.

The youthful queen returned to her palace, smiling all the way. King Dashrath stared at the young girl in his house, 'Who is she? She must be a farmer's daughter who has lost her way. Or is she a divine being who has wandered to the earth? If that hag sees her in the house, she will quarrel with me. I must ask the pretty lass to go away.' He asked the young girl to leave the house but she kept smiling at him. Dashrath was scared by the boldness of the young girl.

At last she said, 'I am not a stranger, king of Ayudha! I am Kaykauchala, your wife! Mahadev has granted me youth and beauty.'

On hearing this, Dashrath's jaw dropped. He looked at Kaykauchala with lust in his eyes. After a few days, young Kaykauchala bled for the first time. On the fifth day of menstruation, Kaykauchala went to the river to have a bath. She cleaned her body, rubbing it with dry clay. She wore new clothes. With great affection she prepared a delicious meal. Kaykauchala had set two plates for the little gods whom Dashrath worshipped. Dashrath went to Ram and Lakshman and fed them. Then he sat with Kaykauchala to enjoy the delicious food. While eating they looked at each other with mischief in their eyes.

Kaykauchala made the king's bed alongside hers. The king gave the third wheat ball of fertility to her. She ate the wheat ball and they waited for midnight, the hour of love, to arrive. At the right moment, the king and the queen made love, and as was god's wish, the queen conceived a child.

Now the king and queen lived happily in Ayudha. Queen Kaykauchala served two dishes every day. Once she requested Dashrath, 'Dear husband! Please give me an opportunity to serve your little gods!'







The king escaped the difficult situation by giving a clever reply, 'Impossible! Only a man can serve the little gods. If I let you go to the gods, they will be offended. They might even curse you, or still worse, they might kill you!'

Kaykauchala laughed and said, 'It is better that you serve them. I don't want to die so soon!'

The child in Kaykauchala's womb grew with each passing month. When nine months and nine days had passed by, the queen said to the king, 'Go and call the midwife. Tell her that your wife is pregnant. She has to bring out the little one from my body!'

The Goddess of Wealth and Goddess of Medicine also came. The midwife massaged Kaykauchala's belly and helped deliver the baby. She announced, 'Queen! You are lucky. You have given birth to two children!'

The children pushed themselves out from the queen's body. The midwife announced, 'If it is a virtuous child it won't trouble its mother. If the child is wicked, the queen will have to suffer pain.'

First one son and then a second son was born. Kaykauchala was delighted to see two sons, 'He will be the heir of Dashrath's kingdom! My son will rule over the people. My son will be the king of Ayudha one day!'

The elder son was named Bharat and the younger one was called Shasrat. They celebrated the fifth, sixth and twelfth day of their son's birth. After one month and fifteen days, Kaykauchala took a bath and washed her hair. She wore new clothes.

One day as Dashrath went out for some work and did not return in time to serve food to Ram and Lakshman. Kaykauchala thought that she should serve food to the little gods and perform the rites in the king's absence. She had become confident after the birth of her sons. She had given Dashrath not one but two heirs. What harm could the little gods do to her now?

Kaykauchala picked up the dishes and went to the small house in which the little gods resided. She stood in front of the closed door,





clasped her hands in supplication and said, 'Little gods! I have come here to offer you food. I have been cooking meals for you every day for one year, but my husband comes here to offer you food because a woman can't do so. Today my husband is away and so I have come here with food so that you do not go hungry! I am sure you won't be angry with me. Please accept my offering!'

After praying thus, Kaykauchala opened the door. Ram and Lakshman were standing right at the entrance! They started crying in joy, 'Our stepmother! Dear stepmother! We love you stepmother!' Speaking words of affection, they embraced Kaykauchala.

The plates fell down from Kaykauchala's hands and she pushed the boys away as if she had been touched by fire. 'I am these boys' stepmother!' wondered Kaykauchala.

The word, 'stepmother' hit Kaykauchala like a hammer, 'King Dashrath cheated me!? He cheated even King Sendri? He told me lies when he proposed to marry me and kept lying even after I came here as his wife! He kept me in the dark about his two sons, and I, trusting him blindly, prepared food for his 'little gods'? He could have told me about his sons after I married him. I would have definitely accepted them as my own!'

Kaykauchala was trembling all over. She was hurt by the king's deceit. Though she was happy about being a mother to two more healthy sons, the king's dishonesty tormented her.

Dashrath returned late from his journey. He could see that his wife was angry with him. Without speaking a word, Kaykauchala served him food.

At last she said, 'I had gone to offer food to your little gods. They are lovely, aren't they?'

The king turned pale. He mumbled, 'I was going to tell you about them, but...'

Kaykauchala began her tirade, 'You tricked me, you cruel man! While proposing marriage to me you should have told me that you had two sons! And you continued to live with your lie even after





marriage! If you had told me about them, I would have raised them well.' Kaykauchala's eyes were bloodshot with anger. 'And I would not have asked for youth and beauty from Mahadev! I pleaded with Mahadev so that I could give you an heir to the throne, not because I wanted to have fun with you! It is my dream that my son will be a king one day. My hopes have been shattered because you have cheated me!'

She continued to vent her anger, 'Now listen to me! I am not a weakling! I will see to it that my son becomes a king. Ram is not my enemy and I sympathise with him since he is a motherless boy, but one day my son Bharat will sit on the throne when the time comes. I have dreamt of that day so often that I will do anything to thwart Ram's way to power and glory. You have manipulated and cheated me but I will rebel against you to achieve what I want.'

'Kaykauchala! Please forget what has already happened. Our sons are still young. As and when they grow up, they will share the administrative duties of our kingdom. We will see what best we can do for them.' After Dashrath's apology, a few days later, Kaykauchala calmed down. Although she looked seemingly composed, Kaykauchala was seething with anger because of the way Dashrath had deceived her.



## Six

Once, Suksen quarreled with the sun and the moon. He went to god and demanded, 'Either you give me the duty of spreading light during the day, like the sun, or assign me the duty of lighting up the night, the way the moon does.'

God tried to appease him, 'Don't be childish! Your power is far less than that of the moon. How can I assign you such a task?'

Suksen felt bad when he heard the honest opinion of god. He decided to embarrass god by playing a nasty trick. He went to Jugjhira, the lake which provided water to the earth and blocked the waterway. Within a few days, all rivers, wells, ponds and lakes turned dry. Animals and human beings suffered without water. They went to god with their complaint and asked for his help. God called Saydev and asked him the cause of this crisis. Saydev referred to his book and said, 'Suksen is the root of this problem. He has blocked the waterway at Jugjhira.'

Suksen was a formidable enemy and a powerful warrior. God did not want to challenge him in a battle. Saydev read his book again and announced that Dashrath, the King of Ayudha, would defeat Suksen in a battle. Dashrath was the only man alive who could match Suksen in strength.

God immediately wrote a letter to Dashrath, 'Suksen has blocked the waterway at Jugajhira. Go to Jugjhira, defeat Suksen in battle





and resume the flow of water to the earth. If you don't accomplish this, people will spit on you.' The wind picked up the letter and in a gust, dropped it at the doorstep of Dashrath's house.

Dashrath read the letter and prepared to go to Jugjhira. Kaykauchala said, 'I wish to join you in this adventure. I have never seen a battle. I want to see you fighting.'

'Dear queen! If you remain present there, I will be anxious about your well-being. I won't be able to fight with Suksen. Gorilakshmi, my first wife, had never come with me when I went to a battle. Besides, if people learn that you are accompanying me to Jugajhira, they will say that the king is so infatuated with his young wife that he can't do without her for even a few days. It wouldn't look good.'

Though he initially discouraged her to join him, Dashrath wanted to keep Kaykauchala happy, for if she got annoyed, Kaykauchala could mess things at home! After arguing for a while, Dashrath agreed to take Kaykauchala along.

Crossing several rivers, mountains and valleys, Dashrath and Kaykauchala reached Jugjhira in their chariot.

The moment he reached Jugjhira, Dashrath challenged Suksen.

'You sinner! You are harassing people on the earth! Innocent animals are dying! Get out of the waterway!'

Belligerent Suksen shot back, 'You better go back to Ayudha! If I end up fighting you, you will be dead in no time!'

'I am not bothered about my life. Cowards bother themselves about life and death, I am no coward. I will live as long as I am destined to live. A drop of your spittle won't kill me. You should worry about your life.'

The battle of words ended and the battle with weapons began. Dashrath fought with bow and arrows, while Suksen used discs. As soon as Dashrath shot one arrow, Suksen shot two discs, one in the direction of Dashrath's body and another toward Dashrath's chariot.

Kaykauchala stayed in Dashrath's chariot. One of Suksen's discs





tore through the axle of the chariot's wheel. Kaykauchala, using her presence of mind, put her finger in the place of the broken excel. Dashrath, ignorant of this, continued to fight. After sometime another wheel of the chariot was broken by Suksen's disc and Kaykauchala saved Dashrath's chariot the same way. The next disc broke the chariot's rod which was attached to the horse's yoke. To save her husband's life, Kaykauchala joined the chariot and the yoke with her leg!

Suksen saw that Dashrath's fight was not going to end because the king was being helped by his clever and brave wife. At last, Suksen ran away to save his life.

Since Dashrath did not know about his wife's act of endurance, he boasted, 'See Kaykauchala! This is how a battle is won! This is how I defeat enemies! And you too are unscathed after such a fierce battle. My defense was solid!'

Kaykauchala replied, 'Oh really! I should show you how battles are won and enemies are defeated!' Saying this, she pulled out her fingers from the wheels and took off her leg from the yoke. In a moment the chariot broke and the king lay on the ground.

'My husband! If I had not been here today, you would have been dead by now.'

The king was ashamed of himself, 'Dear Kaykauchala! Please don't let anyone know about this. No one should know that the king of Ayudha was saved by his wife in a battle.'

'Well, I won't tell anyone about this incident, but you will have to pay a price for letting this be a secret. Now even I have learnt to be tactful like you.'

'Okay, I give you a right to make two wishes. You can use your right whenever you want. I give you my word in the presence of the moon and the sun that I am bound to fulfill your wishes!' King Dashrath won the battle with Suksen, but Kaykauchala won the battle of diplomacy with Dashrath.





Dashrath's four sons, Ram, Lakshman, Bharat and Shasrat, lived peacefully together, enjoying their childhood. Kaykauchala did not discriminate against any of them and raised them well. The little boys, who initially played simple games, eventually learnt to wield weapons like bow and arrows. They had grown lusty and youthful whereas Dashrath became old.

Dashrath, now tired of running the state, once thought, 'I must relinquish power now. I have four sons who should take care of the state affairs. According to tradition, however, Ram should ascend the throne.' He announced that he would step down from the throne the following Wednesday and Ram will ascend the throne of Ayudha from that day onwards.

On the auspicious day of coronation, the entire galaxy of gods gathered to witness the event. The people of Ayudha were celebrating the crowning of Ram. Kaykauchala too was greatly thrilled because she had been eagerly waiting for this day.

Kaykauchala was strutting about in her beautiful nine yard saree. Her enthusiasm was astonishing to all who saw her. What a great mother she was! No one could imagine that she was a stepmother to Ram! She was as happy as Gorilakshmi would have been on this occasion.

Holding the *arati* in her hands, Kaykauchala came to the king. She looked like a celestial nymph in the dim, flickering light of the lamps falling on her face. Lakshman stood to the right of Ram, to Ram's left stood Bharat and Shasrat. Looking at Kaykauchala, Dashrath thought, 'Long ago, Kaykauchala did not want Ram to be the king of Ayudha, but now she has matured in age. She has learnt the lessons of life. How she is preparing for the coronation of Ram! If we all live in peace, all the difficulties of life will become easy to bear!'

First of all, Kaykauchala circled the lamps in front of Dashrath and paid him homage. Then she quietly, but firmly said, 'My husband! King of Ayudha! Now I want to make the wishes you had





granted me after the battle with Suksen!’ The king’s heart missed a beat on this sudden demand made before hundreds of people.

Dashrath appealed to her sense of discretion, ‘Dear queen! Please don’t mention the incident now, I request you. Look, my subjects, the courtiers and all the gods are watching us. Let us celebrate this auspicious day. You may make your wish later; I will fulfill your wishes.’

‘No! This is the moment to make my wish. I have been waiting for this day for years. I know this is an auspicious day, that is why I want to make my wishes now. If I don’t make a wish now, I will never be able to do so again because the moment to make a wish would have been lost.’

The people around, the kings and gods present, all were greatly surprised at Kaykauchala’s stubbornness. Dashrath had many unfavourable thoughts which made him nervous. He remembered what Kaykauchala had said about Ram. ‘What will Kaykauchala demand?’ he wondered. ‘Will she demand that Bharat should be made the king of Ayudha? If she does so then that would be tragic.’ Dashrath remembered his first wife Gorilakshmi and the promise he had given her. By marrying again, he had failed Gorilakshmi, but Kaykauchala would not let him go. She would see to it that her demands were met.

Kaykauchala began her argument, ‘King! I want to remind you of the condition I had put forward when you came with the proposal of marriage. I had told you that I did not want to marry you if you had children from your previous wife. And you cheated me by telling me a lie. I agreed to marry you thinking that you did not have a child from Gorilakshmi. Eventually, I learnt about Ram and Lakshman. If I had not done so, you would have continued with your deception. When I saw Ram and Lakshman, I had decided that my son would become the king of Ayudha and I will ensure that my dream becomes a reality. You tricked me into marrying you, now I will be unfair to you. I think what happened at the battle with Suksen was fated.







Without my asking for anything, you had granted me two wishes that day. Today, I want to make my wishes.'

The king and all present there became speechless by these forthright words. Dashrath was in a difficult situation. In a low voice he said, 'Kaykauchala! What do you want? Tell me, I am bound to give you whatever you ask...'

'My first wish. Ram should be sent away to live in a forest for fourteen years...' On hearing this, loud words of anger and shock arose from the crowd.

'And my sons Bharat and Shasrat should ascend to the throne. This is my second wish,' Kaykauchala presented her demands. Once again, a vehement uproar filled the air.

'The eldest son will not be the crowned king! Moreover, Ram, an innocent young man, will be sent away to the forest!'

Dashrath remembered Gorilakshmi, Ram's mother, who had not wanted him to get married again so that Ram would get his due. 'If I had not married again, I could have avoided such embarrassment,' thought Dashrath and fainted. Everyone present, including the gods, was crying. Bharat and Shasrat were also crying.

Ram came to Dashrath, who had regained consciousness and said, 'Father! I will spend a few years in the forest. I will help you fulfill your promise. There is no need to regret anything. The time I spend in the forest will teach me valuable lessons of life.'

Lakshman, who was inseparable from Ram, said, 'I will come with you to the forest, brother!'

Immediately, the brothers took off their royal finery and put on simple clothes. Gloom replaced the atmosphere of festivity, people as well as the gods looked despondent and helpless. They had come to celebrate but the occasion had turned sad.

'We are leaving, father! We know that you will not be able to bless us on this occasion,' Ram and Lakshman sought their father's consent before leaving for the forest.





In response, Dashrath mumbled, ‘Ram, don’t... Ram... here...with me...’

Ram and Lakshman started walking toward the forest that lay beyond their kingdom. The grief stricken king followed them till the outskirts of Ayudha, crying uncontrollably, calling out his dear son’s name and at times, collapsing on the ground. He had not become so inconsolable even when Gorilakshmi had died because then he had little Ram and Lakshman with him, but now right before his eyes, his lovely sons were being driven out to the forest.

The gods, perched in the sky, followed Ram and Lakshman. Other people walking behind Ram and Lakshman followed them to the forest. The entire procession reached the milky pond outside Ayudha. Dragging himself along with the crowd, Dashrath followed his sons. While he looked at his dear sons going to the forest, he remembered his sister, Rukhmai, her husband Vasudev and their son, Sravan.

‘How my sister and her husband must have suffered at their son’s death! They must have experienced unbearable sorrow. I can’t bear the agony of separating from my son even when he is going to the forest for only a few years!’ Dashrath understood why Rukhmai and Vasudev had decided to die on the pyre of Sravan. They had chosen death over a life of agony without their dear son.

Once again Dashrath cried, ‘Ram! Don’t go away, come back to me!’

His voice choked and he could not speak any more. Ram, determined to go to the forest, wondered why his father had suddenly become quiet. Turning back, he looked into the sad eyes of his father and at that very moment, Dashrath suffered a terrible pain in the chest and his lifeless body dropped on the ground. Rukhmai’s curse had taken Dashrath’s life.

Having completed his father’s last rituals, Ram bid farewell to the people of Ayudha and to the gods present there. Everyone left the scene but Bharat and Shasrat stayed back to talk to their eldest brother.





Bharat said, 'Brother Ram! As our father is no more, you need not go to the forest. Please live with us and take care of the kingdom.'

'I am going to live in the forest as I must abide by my father's word. Now that he has passed away, his instructions have acquired even more value. I must observe them now,' Ram replied quietly.

Bharat did not want Ram to go to the forest, so he argued, 'But we four brothers have always lived together, enjoying one another's company. We will find it difficult to live without you. Besides, father is no longer around to guide us.'

'Dear brothers! We have to adjust to our circumstances! Time teaches us everything,' Ram encouraged his younger brothers to live in his absence.

'If you are determined to leave Ayudha, we will also join you and Lakshman. We will stay wherever you choose to live.'

'The way I am following father's instructions, you too should do so. Father wanted you to sit on the throne, so you should respect his wish and perform your duty. Treat this as my command.'

'But I have never wanted to sit on the throne. How shall I take care of the kingdom?'

'Shasrat will help you handle your responsibilities. Mother will also guide you. I wish you well and bless you so that you succeed in performing your duty.'

Realizing that Ram would not give in, at last Bharat said, 'If this is your wish, please give me your wooden shoes so that I can place them on the throne. Although I will take care of the state affairs, I will not sit on the throne because it is meant for you. Thus, we will both be able to carry out father's wish.'

Ram gave his wooden shoes and two arrows to Bharat, and then advised him, 'If Ayudha faces calamity from the sky, shoot an arrow in that direction. It will drive away the oncoming tragedy. And if a catastrophe advances over the land of Ayudha, shoot an arrow in that direction to avoid it. These arrows will eliminate your problems and





then return to you.’

The sad moment of separation arrived. Ram and Lakshman started for the forest, whereas

Bharat and Shasrat returned to Ayudha.



## SEVEN

The sun had set. The forest had turned dark. Ram and Lakshman were about to spend their first night in the forest. They looked for a cave to sleep in. Lakshman discovered a cave that appeared safe from wild animals. But the moment they entered it, strange sounds poured out from inside. At times a fox screamed from inside the cave, and at another moment a tiger roared from within. Even birds such as peacocks and crows were calling out from inside the cave.

Ram and Lakshman stood still. They wondered how so many birds and animals resided together in a cave! In a moment, a snake and a tiger emerged from the cave. They saw the brothers and said, 'Let us go out of this cave. We are living in great misery here!'

Ram addressed the animals, 'Tell me, what the matter is? We heard sounds of so many animals from inside the cave. What are you animals doing in the cave?'

'We are tormented by Ravan. He has forbidden us to hunt or graze in the forest during the day. We spend the entire day hiding in this dark cave. Since he has not seen the cave we are safe inside. When night falls we venture out and eat our fill. We are so tormented by Ravan that all the animals, small and big, have become friends and live together in the cave.'

Ram listened to them and boldly said to the animals, 'You are all free from this moment. Live wherever you want and eat whatever





you wish. I will live with you in this forest. You need not fear anyone anymore.'

All the birds and beasts rushed outside, crying happily. They started feeding upon the food they loved. They started living wherever they wished to. All the burrows, trees, caves and stones became home to the animals. Ram and Lakshman wandered in the forest, looking for food and shelter. They ate wild fruits and drank water from rivulets.

In Janakipur, King Janak's daughter, Sita had become marriageable. Years ago, Dashrath had advised Sita's father on how to find a suitable match for her with the help of his bow and arrows. To find a match for Sita, Janak announced the day of the contest and sent a message to all renowned kings except Ravan. The day of the event arrived and people came from all corners. Musicians played a variety of instruments like drums, flutes and tabors to welcome the guests.

On the day of the contest, Ram and Lakshman were looking for a rivulet. They went to the bank of the river Panganga and started digging a puddle to get clean water. Mud sank down and clean water rose to the surface of the puddle. Ram sat on his knees and bent his body to drink the water, the way an animal would with its muzzle. He felt the vibrations of the musical instruments being played in Janakipur. When Lakshman lowered his body to drink water, Ram asked him to fill water in the cup of his hands. Lakshman argued, 'No! I will drink water the same way as you did!' The moment he dipped his lips into the puddle, he too felt the vibrations of music. He said excitedly, 'I think a celebration is being held somewhere close by. Let us go and see what kind of a merry crowd has gathered there!'

They followed the vibrations and reached Janakipur, the city of their father's sister! They hurried to the venue of the competition and saw that a terrible tragedy was about to take place. Ravan, the ruthless tyrant, was lying under a heavy bow, moaning in pain. He





repeatedly cried out, 'Kasiram, help me! Santaram, help me!' He did not want to call out Ram's name because if he did, people would ridicule him!

Moreover, Ravan had come to the competition even when he was not invited! He had barged into the assembly and then boasted that he would pierce the fish and marry Sita. He was the first to pick the bow and arrow, not allowing anyone else to take a chance.

When Sita saw that Ravan was going to make the first attempt to pierce the fish, she thought, 'I wish my uncle's bow strikes the wicked Ravan and he is crushed by it. He will then learn a lesson and it will be a suitable punishment for his overbearing pride! I would like to see him flee the competition in shame.'

And that is what had happened!

Hearing Ravan's cries, many soldiers rushed to help him, but none had the courage to get close to him. Ravan was frantically moving his eighteen hands. What if one of those eighteen hands slapped a soldier?

Ram and Lakshman felt great pity when they saw Ravan struggling helplessly under the bow. He was in danger and someone must help him. Lakshman thought, 'Ravan had brought me to Ram. Though his intention was to kill Ram, I would not have met Ram otherwise. I am with Ram today because Ravan had brought me from my father on the pretext of adopting me. I must save him from this tragedy. I must help him!'

Lakshman came forward to save the king of Lanka! Everyone was taken aback by the boldness of this young boy. They wondered, 'How would he lift the heavy bow?' Lakshman pressed the bow with the toe of his left foot and in an instant the other end of the arrow sprang up! He caught the bow and immediately Ravan, the weight now off his body, fled from the venue, without bothering to even thank Lakshman!

The kings who had come to participate in the competition, wondered, 'Even Ravan could not lift the bow! Who then will pierce





the fish?’

Janak knew that the rival kings looked gloomy and probably none would come forward to take up the challenge after witnessing Ravan’s humiliation. He announced that as the competition was open only for a few hours, the participating kings must make an attempt as soon as possible. But no one dared pick the bow.

Lakshman sought permission from Ram, ‘Brother! If you allow, I will pierce the fish in an instant!’

Ram expressed his doubts, ‘Dear Lakshman! I know you will be able to pick up the bow and arrows, and I am confident of your ability to pierce the fish, but the feat of taking a dip in simmering oil is indeed scary. If something happens to you, I will lose a dear friend! Any harm that you suffer will hurt me too. I feel scared to even imagine this!’

‘Brother! I promise you that nothing will go wrong and that I will be safe. I know how one can take a dip in simmering oil.’

‘If you are so confident then go ahead. I wish that you achieve success in this contest!’

When people saw Lakshman coming forward to pierce the fish, they felt sure of his success as they had already witnessed his strength. Lakshman bowed to all the great kings present there. Then he effortlessly picked up the bow and arrow, looked into the simmering oil below to see the reflection of the fish placed above. He judged the speed of the rotating fish, pointed the arrow in its direction and in a moment shot an arrow, piercing the left eye of the speeding fish! Without waiting for a moment, Lakshman jumped into the simmering oil, dipped easily in it as many as seven times and then jumped out. Having emerged from the hot oil, Lakshman picked up a pungent betel leaf lying in a plate, chewed it and spat on the vegetation of the forest nearby. The forest burst into flames.

All participants present there were greatly impressed by Lakshman’s performance. Blushing, Sita came forward with the arati to worship Lakshman. He said to her, ‘I am not of royal lineage and







so you should not marry me. Besides, I participated in the competition with the consent of my brother, Ram. Hence, you should marry Ram. You will both make a perfect match!’

Sita put the wedding garland around Ram’s neck. King Janak and Queen Janaka were happy to see their daughter married to Ram. Janak, who was aware that Ram was to live in a forest, said to him, ‘We have given you our daughter in marriage. Now you have to decide whether you wish to take her to the forest or you wish her to remain with us till you live in the woods.’

But Sita immediately said, ‘How can I live in a palace, enjoying the comforts of town life, while my husband lives in a forest? I will accompany him to the forest and live with him, however difficult the conditions!’

Thus Sita went to the forest with Ram and Lakshman. They went to the Dandaka forest and made a small hut amidst five banyan trees. The square hut was the length of twenty hands. Lakshman made two rooms in it, one for Ram and Sita and another for himself.

When Lakshman went out to pick wild fruits, Ram and Sita stayed back in the hut. On the first day, Lakshman brought a bowlful of toran, a delicious forest fruit, and gave them to Sita. He then went to his room to take rest.

Sita went to Ram and said, ‘Lakshman must have eaten fruits while he was in the forest. These are for us. Let us eat them.’ They did not ask Lakshman if he had eaten anything.

Lakshman thought, ‘I had brought all the fruits in one bowl, so they must have thought that the fruits were just for them. Tomorrow, I will bring the fruits in two bowls. One for them and one for myself.’

The next day when Lakshman brought fruits in two bowls, Sita thought, ‘Good! Lakshman has brought one bowl for me and another for his brother.’ Sita and Ram ate their fill and Lakshman remained hungry on both days.

Eventually, Lakshman learned to subsist on air!





In the Dandaka forest, Sabresur, son of Ravan's cousin Subhanakha, was observing a penance for twelve long years. Once in every three months Subhanaka visited her son and prepared delicious food for him. He required food once in three months as he used to eat *aghedo*.

Sabresur's penance was coming to an end. If he completed his penance, he would achieve the status of a god. As the gods did not want Sabresur to be their equal in importance and power, they had tried hard to break his penance, failing every time. Now their only option lay in killing Sabresur!

The gods hurled a scimitar from the sky. It flew toward Sabresur at great speed. Engaged in worship, Sabresur sat inside a cavern surrounded by bamboo trees. It was a quiet grove that covered Sabresur so well that no one could guess that someone lived inside it! The scimitar, shining in the sunlight, sped toward the cavern. In the meanwhile, Lakshman, who was wandering in the forest, reached close to the growth of bamboo trees and saw the scimitar. He thought that the rapidly moving scimitar would kill him, so he jumped in the air and caught the flying weapon! He was surprised to see the beautiful weapon and thought of testing its sharpness. Lakshman powerfully swished the scimitar at the bamboo trees, and in a single blow, all the trees got hacked in two. Lakshman did not realize that when he slashed the bamboo trees, he had killed Sabresur, who was inside the cavern.

On the same day, Subhnakha had come to the forest to offer lunch to her son. She had brought a variety of delicious dishes. When she saw the bamboo trees lying on the ground and her son's body in a puddle of blood, Subhanaka was terrified. She looked around for signs of the killer and noticed footprints. Subhanaka followed the footprints and in a while she saw Lakshman wandering in the forest. Subhanakha recognized Lakshman and hence did not attack him foolishly. She knew that Lakshman, who was snake Vasuki's son, lived with his brother Ram in the forest. She also knew that Lakshman





had saved Ravan when he lay crushed under Janak's heavy bow and that it was Lakshman who had eventually won the competition by piercing the fish. One had to use guile while fighting such a powerful man.

Subhanakha transformed herself into a beautiful, sixteen year old girl. She looked so extraordinary that her glow could dazzle even the sun and the moon! Wearing a seductive smile on her face, she went close to Lakshman and began to murmur a song. The moment Lakshman looked at her, she exclaimed, 'Oh Lakshman! You look so sad! I pity you for your fate.'

'Why should you pity me? I am fine.'

'You won the competition by accomplishing all the difficult tasks, and yet Sita went to Ram. Look they are both enjoying life! Don't you feel like enjoying yourself?'

Lakshman heard this prattle and thought that he should tease the girl, so he agreed with her, 'You are right. As soon as I saw you, I felt like marrying you. You are indeed so beautiful! But before marriage, I have to seek my brother and his wife's permission. Why don't you go and speak to them about our wedding?'

Subhanakha went to Ram and announced, 'Your brother Lakshman has sent me to you. He wishes to marry me but is scared to come to you with the idea. So he has sent me to discuss our marriage.'

Ram, puzzled by what Subhanakha said, looked at her. He knew that as Lakshman was not intimate with any woman, the question of marriage did not arise. For a few moments he contemplated the matter. The divine power of his mind gave him the answer to his bafflement. Ram learnt about the unintentional death of Sabresur at Lakshman's hands. He knew that Subhanakha, a demonic woman, could kill his younger brother merely by her touch because Lakshman was a snake-child. Cleverly, Ram wrote a note informing Lakshman about Subhanakha's identity and advised him to kill her immediately.

Ram gave the note to Sita and asked her to stick it to





Subhanakha's back. Then he advised Subhanakha to show her back to Lakshman so that he could read the note. Subhanakha was delighted to hear this and went to Lakshman. Lakshman was surprised to see her because he had expected Ram to get rid of this nuisance.

Subhanakha said to Lakshman, 'Your brother has accepted our relationship. As he cannot convey his message orally, he has stuck a note on my back. Look, read it.' Subhanakha turned her back to Lakshman. Although her back was toward Lakshman, she turned her face back to see Lakshman's reaction to the note. She had the impression that Lakshman would embrace her from behind and immediately he would turn into a heap of ash! Lakshman however, picked up the scimitar instead of hugging her. Subhanakha read Lakshman's face and became alert.

Swish! Lakshman struck her with the sharp weapon. Subhanakha fell on her knees to save herself, but her face, which was turned backwards, could not be saved and her nose got chopped off! Lakshman's scimitar slipped out of his hand and flew across the blue sky, back to the gods.

Subhanakha screamed with pain. She had come to kill Lakshman but on the contrary, she was now in trouble. Rescuing herself from another stroke from Lakshman and from certain death, Subhanakha fled to Lanka.

Subhanakha went to her brother Ravan and gave him an account of Sabresur's death and her humiliation at Lakshman's hands. Ravan deliberated on his deep rooted enmity with Ram. He regretted what he had done to Dashrath, following Narandev's counsel. He thought, 'I followed Narandev's advice, but eventually Dashrath escaped death, his wife gave birth to Ram and I had to bring Vasuki's son on earth to kill Ram. I was humiliated in Janak's competition and now Sabrasur has been killed. I triggered these events and now I cannot live in peace.'

Ravan decided that Ram and Lakshman should be taught a lesson because they had insulted Subhanakha, the sister of the most





powerful king on earth. Ravan remembered his life as a lame child who had been ignored and insulted by his elder brothers. But those days of pathetic, dependent life were long over. Now things were in his control and he wanted to act as the most powerful man alive.

Ravan believed that no king would help Ram in a war and so he felt it was safe to challenge Ram in a battlefield. With this intention, Ravan made a plan to abduct Sita. Sita's abduction would be a sound revenge for the humiliation he had suffered at Sita's wedding contest and for Subhanakha's insult. Besides, abducting Ram's wife would be an insult to Ram.

Assuming the form of a peacock, Ravan began to live around Ram's hut which was in the midst of five banyan trees. The peacock followed Sita wherever she went, whether to the river or into the forest. Sita, ignorant of the peacock's true identity, took a liking to the bird. Once she expressed a wish to wear a blouse made of the peacock's skin. She said to her husband, 'Shoot an arrow at its head, not its body. If the arrow injures the peacock's body, its skin-coat will be ripped apart.'

Unfortunately, the peacock did not appear that day. When Sita went to fetch water, Ram followed her to see if the colourful bird would make an appearance somewhere. Right then, Ram heard the peacock's cry in the forest and began to follow the direction of the call.

Filling her pot with water from a nearby river, Sita returned to the hut. She was all alone, waiting for Ram to return with the peacock's skin. But after some time, Lakshman, instead of Ram, came to the hut with fruits. Sita did not like Lakshman's presence inside the hut when Ram was not around, but she could not ask him to leave.

Following the peacock's cries, Ram went deep into the forest. Ravan, in the form of a peacock, was determined to abduct Sita. When Ram had reached deep into the dense forest, the peacock cried, 'Help! Lakshman, help!' Sita heard the cry and asked Lakshman to





rush to the forest and save his brother. She was sure that Ram was in trouble.

‘No, that is not Ram’s voice. I can recognize even the sigh of my brother,’ Lakshman said firmly.

‘Won’t you go and help your brother?’

‘I am sure it was not Ram’s voice. He is not in any kind of trouble, but if I leave you alone, you will definitely get into harm’s way.’

Annoyed by Lakshman’s reply, Sita argued, ‘I wonder why you want to be near me in Ram’s absence. If this is what you wanted, you should have accepted me as your wife at the wedding contest.’

‘What you allege is not true. I am indeed worried for your safety. If you want me to leave you, I will immediately do so. But before I leave, I want you to know the three steps to our hut. The first step is that of Truth, the second of Duty and the third and last one is that of Sin. Please do not leave the hut when you are alone. If you cross the first step, it will be disrespectful to Truth; if you cross the second step, you will be disrespectful to your Duty; and, if you cross the third step, you will be committing a Sin. Your transgression will push our lives into anarchy.’ Speaking these grave words of warning, Lakshman left the hut to look for Ram.

Ravan was waiting for such an opportunity. As soon as Lakshman left for the forest, Ravan came to the hut in the guise of an ascetic and asked for alms. Since the hut was in the forest, no one had ever visited it so far. Sita was curious about this unexpected visitor and came out with a few fruits. The ascetic was waiting outside. Sita recalled Lakshman’s words about the steps of Truth, Duty and Sin. Though she stopped for a while, thinking about Lakshman’s warning, she also felt loathing for her husband’s younger brother. She thought, ‘Who is he to advise me? I am married to Ram, the son of a royal family. Lakshman is merely an adopted son. Why should I follow his instructions?’

In haste, Sita climbed down the steps and stood right before





Ravan. The wicked king of Lanka, who had been waiting for this moment, pushed aside the bowl of fruits that Sita had offered him, caught her hand and pulled her to him. Laughing loudly, he ran in the direction of Lanka. Poor Sita remembered Lakshman's warnings but it was all meaningless now as Ravan had tricked her in the absence of Ram and Lakshman.

When delicate Sita was being dragged thus by the mighty Ravan, she saw a bulbul singing songs. She said to the bird, 'Bulbul! If you meet my dear husband Ram, tell him that Ravan has abducted me.'

'Definitely, mother, I will convey your message to him,' the bulbul replied.

Sita blessed the bulbul and sprinkled the vermilion from her forehead upon it. The bird gratefully accepted the gesture and began twittering melodious songs.

When Ravan dragged her a little way ahead, Sita met a squirrel. She said to the squirrel, 'Squirrel! If you meet my dear husband Ram, tell him that Ravan has abducted me.'

'Definitely mother, I will convey your message to him,' the squirrel replied.

Sita stroked the squirrel with her fingers which left long streaks on the squirrel's body.

Going a little ahead, she met a female dove. Sita said to her, 'Dove! If you meet my dear husband Ram, tell him that Ravan has abducted me.'

'Definitely, mother, I will convey your message to him,' the dove replied.

Sita took off her garland and gave it to the dove.

On the way, Sita met a chameleon. She told him, 'Chameleon! If you meet my dear husband Ram, tell him that Ravan has abducted me.'

The chameleon replied rudely, 'You think I am loafing around? I don't have time for passing on messages to people.'





Sita tried to persuade him, 'But chameleon, it is customary to help someone who is in trouble...'

'Don't teach me what I should do. Don't talk to me now, let me do my work.'

Sita was angry with the chameleon, 'You are so arrogant! I curse you so that your body will change colours during the monsoon and whenever children see you they will stone you to death...'

Ravan took Sita to Lanka. He offered her a beautiful palace to live but Sita did not want to stay there. Refusing the luxury of a palace, Sita opted to live in a nearby forest. Instead of sleeping on a comfortable bed, she chose to sleep on the grass beneath a tree.



Sita's behaviour had deeply hurt Lakshman. He felt like crying because Sita had made allegations on him. He thought about his life, 'Ravan brought me on earth on the pretext of adopting me. Later, I learnt that I was supposed to kill Ram and after living with Ram for such a long time, his wife thought that I lust after her.'

Lakshman was angry with what had happened but he was also anxious about Ram's well-being, 'Ram must be alone in the forest. Like me, he too has not received mother's love. He lost his throne, and our step-mother sent him to the forest. Sita has married him recently. I must help Ram at any cost.'

Thinking about his own life and Ram's safety, Lakshman kept walking through the dense woods. A strange fear had overpowered him because he could see that the day's incidents did not bode well for the future. First, Ram had followed the peacock's cry, then an unfamiliar voice had screamed Lakshman's name, and finally, Sita had forced him to go into the forest to look for Ram. Lakshman still believed that the voice was not that of Ram's.

After looking around for a long time, Lakshman thought of returning to the hut. He was sure that a grave matter was at hand.







Lakshman ran toward the hut. On reaching there, he saw that the hut looked deserted. He started trembling and called out, 'Sister! Sister!'

When he did not receive a reply, Lakshman peeped into the room used by Ram and Sita. He did so for the first time since they had started living in the hut. He hesitated for a while and then decided to go inside and see if Sita was in the room. The room was dark and and after entering it, Lakshman could not see anything for a while. To make sure if Sita was sleeping in the room, he bent down and tried to light a fire in the tin stove lying in a corner.

Right then, Ram came home. He noticed that Lakshman's wooden slippers were lying outside his and Sita's room. He wondered, 'Does it mean that Sita is also inside the room? And Lakshman...?' The quiet hut and Lakshman's footwear outside the room brought unwelcome thoughts to Ram's mind. He quietly waited for a while and then looked inside. He saw that Lakshman was making quick movements in the dark room. He felt sure that what he had suspected was indeed true. Lakshman and Sita were inside and....! Quickly making up his mind, Ram prepared his bow and arrow. Just as he was about to shoot the arrow, Lakshman lit the stove. The room became brightly lit and Ram saw that Lakshman was alone in the room. Lakshman had been moving to light the stove on the floor.

When Lakshman saw his brother outside the room, he rushed to him and told him in an excited voice, 'Brother! *Bhabhi* is nowhere around! Not even in the room!'

Holding back his arrow Ram stood there, wondering what to do with his arrow now. The arrow was mounted on the string and he had to use it somewhere. It was impossible to put it back. A crow that lived in a tree close to Ram's hut flew over to a nearby tree and advised, 'Pierce my one eye with your arrow. I will manage with one eye.' Ram, who was embarrassed after what had happened, shot the arrow in the crow's eye.

Lakshman could guess why Ram had prepared the bow and





arrow, but ignoring the incident completely, he narrated the happenings to his elder brother. After looking around the hut, Ram and Lakshman concluded that someone had cleverly abducted Sita.

The sun had set, it was already dark in the forest. Ram was tired, hungry and annoyed. When Lakshman prepared rice and served him, Ram asked him, 'Won't you eat today?' Lakshman softly explained that after Sita had come over, he had made it a habit to subsist on air. Surprised by this revelation, Ram insisted that Lakshman should eat a little. After much persuasion, Lakshman said, 'Brother, stick one grain of rice on my forehead so that you are happy that I accepted food, and I will be glad that I respected your wish.' Ram did as Lakshman had suggested.

In the morning, Ram and Lakshman began looking for Sita. Walking through the forest, they met the dove, the squirrel and the bulbul, who faithfully conveyed Sita's message to them. Thus, Ram and Lakshman learnt that Sita had been abducted by none other than Ravan, the king of Lanka.

The brothers set out for Lanka. Midway, they came to the lake Pampa, where they met Sabari, a Bhil woman. On meeting Ram, Sabari fondly told him, 'I knew that your hut is in the forest, at the place with five banyan trees, and I was sure that one day you will come here. I am glad to see you.' Saying words of devotion, Sabari offered berries to Ram, which he ate with great pleasure. Sabari described the qualities of the berries, 'These berries and the leaves of its plants are good for health. If someone catches a falling leaf from the plant before the leaf touches the ground, that leaf has the power of a divine herbal medicine.'

Ram and Lakshman left Pampa and walked ahead. Hanuman, who lived in the Dandak forest, saw the brothers and felt sympathy for them. Hanuman knew how Ram had been denied his right to the throne and that his wife was abducted by Ravan. Hanuman felt that he should help Ram in his search for Sita. Before joining Ram and Lakshman in their journey to Lanka, Hanuman thought of





testing them. Hanuman wanted to make sure that the brothers were worth his assistance. With this purpose, Hanuman attempted to abduct a woman before Ram and Lakshman! Ram heard the cries of the woman but since he himself felt troubled at that moment, he did not want to get involved in yet another difficulty. However, Lakshman immediately said, 'When Ravan abducted Sita, I am sure others must have thought like you...'

Saying such wise words, Lakshman went to Hanuman and challenged him, 'Leave this woman immediately. If you won't do so, I will kill you...' Bravely, Lakshman prepared his bow and arrow for a battle.

Hanuman released the woman and clasping his hands stood before Ram and Lakshman. He said to them, 'I am Hanuman and I live in the same forest in which you live. I know your difficulties and I will be happy to help you.'

Ram and Lakshman were glad to find a sympathetic friend and they all sat down to plan a strategy to rescue Sita. Hanuman spoke at length and with frankness about the resources he could employ in search of Sita. 'As I live in the forest, I don't have to step out of the woods to meet my requirements. I don't know anything about the people who live outside. But I know enough about demons because they live among us in the forest. They are adamant and ambitious by nature. Take the example of Ravan, who is a demon. Although he was lame and weak as a child, he has now turned into a mighty tyrant. Sabresur, whom Lakshman killed, was a demon determined to complete his twelve years long penance! Such is the power of demons, and you both will find it difficult to fight a troop of them. But I and my troop of monkeys are ready to help you defeat Ravan.'

Speaking words of encouragement, Hanuman started assembling his friends. He was confident that the forest-dwelling monkeys will be able to defeat the demons of Ravan. They started walking toward Lanka. After a long journey, they stopped at the





seashore. It was impossible to swim through it, and Lanka lay right across the ocean. Ravan's brightly lit city was visible at the shore across but in between lay a stormy ocean. How would they cross the deep waters? Ram made a bridge of arrows but when Hanuman jumped on it to test its strength, the bridge caved in! Poor Hanuman sank inside the ocean and turned into a stone. Lakshman brought the stone out of water and broke it into pieces. In an instant, Hanuman leaped out! Finally, they decided to build a bridge of stones.

Hanuman made a small hut for Ram and Lakshman. It was decided that Hanuman should be the first to go to Lanka. He took Ram's ring as evidence that he was Ram's friend and then started swimming across the ocean. Swimming through the stormy waters, Hanuman started sweating, and the drops of his sweat went deep into the ocean. A *magardhjin* lived in the ocean. She swallowed Hanuman's sweat and conceived a baby by the sweat drops. When the child was born, it looked like a human baby. That baby was named Magardhaji.

When Hanuman reached Lanka, he first went to Ravan's palace. He did not see Sita in the palace. He looked for her in the palace gardens but the gardens appeared quiet. After looking around for a long time Hanuman noticed a forlorn looking woman sitting beneath a tree. A few women were sitting some distance away from her as if to keep an eye on the lonely woman. Casually, Hanuman went close to her and threw Ram's ring before the woman. She did not take note of the ring initially, but when she saw it, she looked gratefully at Hanuman. Her look made Hanuman sure that she was none other than Sita.

Hanuman went close to her and told her that Ram and Lakshman were just across the ocean and would come to Lanka to save her. Giving her information about the preparation for a battle, he comforted her. Sita explained to Hanuman that she had chosen to live in the garden because she could not enjoy the luxury of the palace while Ram was facing hardships in the forest. With confidence





in her strength, she said that she would patiently suffer through her period of separation from Ram, her dear husband.

Hanuman wanted to see Ravan's court. The best way to reach there was by misbehaving in the city. Hanuman started damaging the plants and flowers in the palaces and in no time, Ravan's soldiers came running to stop him. Quick and powerful, Hanuman gave the soldiers a difficult time, jumping from one tree to another. The sentries followed him, climbing many trees. Eventually, Hanuman let the Lankan sentries catch him. The soldiers took Hanuman to the court where he carefully saw Ravan and his courtiers.

Ravan heard about Hanuman's actions and ordered his soldiers to burn him alive. Honestly and boldly, Hanuman defended himself, 'I am a message bearer sent by Ram. I damaged your gardens so that the soldiers would bring me to you. Now please pay heed to what I say. I request you to release Sita, Ram's wife.'

Ravan answered defiantly, 'Ram and his brother Lakshman have always troubled me. Lakshman, whom I had brought to the earth, insulted me at Sita's wedding competition. Then he killed Sabresur, my sister's son and attempted to kill my sister. To humiliate the two brothers, I have abducted Sita. If they want her back, they will have to fight a battle with me.'

Vibhisan, Ravan's wise brother, tried to appease the angry king of Lanka but Ravan was in no mood to receive counsel from anyone. He even refused to treat Hanuman decently.



On his return Hanuman gave an account of his visit to Ram and Lakshman. They decided to invade Lanka the next day and went to sleep. In the morning, when Ram and Lakshman did not come out of their hut, Hanuman and his friends went inside to see what had happened. To their surprise, they saw a tunnel inside the hut! The brave brothers had been abducted in the darkness of the night!





Was this Ravan's doing? Was he clever enough to abduct Ram? Ravan must have thought that if he could confine Ram and Lakshman, no one would come to the rescue of Sita. Unfortunately, Ravan had not thought about Hanuman, the forest-dweller, who was Ram's friend. Brave, powerful and clever, Hanuman was prepared to do anything to find Ram.

Hanuman disguised himself and went to Lanka. Quietly, he made observations in the by-lanes of the city but did not notice anything unusual. Feeling disappointed, Hanuman was planning to leave Lanka when he heard a commotion in the temple of Kalka, the Mother Goddess. He went to the temple and enquired, 'Is this a new temple?' He asked a nice-looking man, 'I am new to the city and thought of visiting the temple,' Hanuman clarified.

'A festival will be held here tomorrow on the occasion of Dasara. Two virtuous men with exemplary qualities will be sacrificed on the alter of the Goddess!'

Two virtuous men with exemplary qualities! Who else but Ram and Lakshman could be described in such terms! On further enquiry, the man informed Hanuman that the men who were going to be sacrificed were kept in a chamber behind the temple.

Planning a strategy to save Ram and Lakshman, Hanuman waited for night to fall. As soon as it was dark, Hanuman went to the secret chamber behind the temple. 'Stop! You there!' a guard with a strong physique said, and then bravely fought a duel with Hanuman. The fight lasted a long time but eventually resulted in Hanuman's victory. Appreciating his adversary's strength, Hanuman said to him, 'I don't want to kill you because you are courageous and strong, but to release these virtuous men, I will first have to take your life. Remember your parents for the last time. And before dying tell me about them. I want to know who gave birth to such a mighty son.'

'My name is Magardhaj. My mother is Magardhagin and Hanuman is my father!'





‘What? I am Hanuman, but I have never known a Magardhajn! How could I father a child?’

Magardhaj sought his father’s blessings and explained, ‘When you were swimming in the ocean, your sweat drops seeped into the water. My mother swallowed a drop and conceived me. I was born immediately and grew up within the next few moments. Ahi and Mahi gave me the task of guarding his castle. Hence I am here.’

Hanuman and Magardhaj embraced each other. Then Magardhaj took his father to Ram and Lakshman. Ahi and Mahi were mighty warriors and before confronting Ravan, one had to first defeat Ahi and Mahi. Hanuman revealed his plan to the brothers, ‘In the morning, Ahi and Mahi will bring you to Kalka’s temple for your sacrifice. I will carry your bow and arrows to the temple and hide them behind the idol of the Mother Goddess. When I see you at the temple before the sacrifice begins, I will speak from behind the idol as if Goddess Kalka is speaking and ask Ahi and Mahi to send you to the sanctum sanctorum. After you come in you should pick up your extraordinary bows and arrows and kill Ahi and Mahi!’

Hanuman went to the seashore across Lanka and brought Ram and Lakshman’s bows and arrows. His friends, the monkeys, also arrived. Instructed to be prepared for a battle in the morning, Hanuman’s troops anxiously hid around the temple. Hanuman kept the bows and arrows in the sanctum sanctorum.

In the morning, Ahi and Mahi brought Ram and Lakshman to the Kalka temple. The door of the temple was closed. Suddenly, a voice was heard from inside the temple. It was Hanuman who was acting according to the plan.

‘Listen to me King Ahi and King Mahi! I wish to purify these two men before the sacrifice. Send the two virtuous men inside. First, they will have to participate in a ritual. After the ritual is over, you should come inside. If you do not follow my instructions, I will curse you!’

Ahi and Mahi released Ram and Lakshman and sent them inside





the temple. Lakshman took the arms and began preparations for the attack.

Hanuman, pretending to be Kalka, continued, 'Ahi and Mahi! In a moment, I will appear before the people so that they can worship me. Till then you should all chant, 'Mother! O, My mother! Appear before me! Mother! O my Mother!'

People outside the temple, including Ahi and Mahi, began to chant. After a few moments Ram and Lakshman emerged from the temple and attacked Ahi, Mahi and their courtiers. As if this was not enough, the forest dwelling monkey-men also joined the battle. Ahi and Mahi were headstrong and fearless. Though they had come to visit the temple, they had carried their arms and thus they could strike back after the initial shock. Their courtiers too started to fight in defense. Both sides fought fiercely, turning the temple into a battlefield. In spite of being seriously injured, Ahi and Mahi carried the fight relentlessly.

Hanuman wondered why Ram and Lakshman could not defeat Ahi and Mahi. To find an answer to this mystery, Hanuman jumped out of the battlefield, disguised himself as a seller of tawdry items like bracelets and combs and went to the palace of Ahi and Mahi. Ahi and Mahi's queens called him inside the palace and expressed their wish to see the wares that Hanuman was selling. Warning the seller, the queen said, 'We will buy your goods, but since our husbands are not at home we will pay you later.'

Hanuman replied carelessly, 'It is fine with me. But what if your husbands are killed in the battle at the temple?'

With confidence the queens replied, 'Impossible! The souls of our husbands are inside the bodies of two parrots living in a palm tree on a deserted island in the middle of the ocean. Our husbands will die only if the parrots die!'

Without wasting a moment, Hanuman jumped and rushed toward the deserted island. Climbing the palm tree, he killed the parrots. At the same moment, the arrows ripped the bodies of Ahi







and Mahi. In no time they collapsed on the ground.

Having heard of the deaths of Ahi and Mahi, their queens, Devsendra and Devnaka came to the temple, weeping at the tragic deaths of their husbands.

Ahi and Mahi's queens saw Hanuman, the comb-seller! They regretted revealing the secret of their husband's mortality to him. Hanuman felt deep sympathy for them.

Queen Sendra and Panaka addressed Hanuman and said 'Will you do us a favor?'

'Sure, if it is within my means,' Hanuman politely replied.

'No, you must promise us that you will fulfill our demand,' the queens persisted.

Believing that their demands would be trifling, Hanuman promised to do whatever they asked.

'We do not have a child. Before that fortunate moment could arrive, our husbands met their end. We desire that you send Ram and Lakshman to us tonight. Please don't back out as you have given us your word.'

Trapped in a clever ploy, Hanuman looked down in shame. The demand of the queens was most unusual. To avoid the embarrassing situation, Hanuman put a condition, 'Ram and Lakshman will come to you tonight, but when they sit on your bed and if the cot breaks, they will not be bound to spend the night with you.'

Everyone appreciated Hanuman for his clever handling of the battle with Ahi and Mahi. But Hanuman was under the pressure of fulfilling his promise to Sendra and Panaka. How could he tell Ram and Lakshman about the difficult situation he had put them into?

Lakshman noticed Hanuman's anxiety and asked him the reason for it. Hanuman explained everything. Lakshman suggested a way out, 'You should take the help of white ants. Tell them to eat the cot of Sendra and Panaka. After the ants relish the cot's wood, only its outer structure will remain intact. When we sit on the bed, the cots





will collapse.’

Hanuman went to a colony of white ants and instructed them to destroy the cots in Sendra and Panaka’s bedrooms. The queens, unaware of the ants’ activity, closed their bedrooms and prepared to kill Ram and Lakshman. The woman filled their mouths with poison so that they could pass it on to Ram and Lakshman.

The queen of ants indicated to Hanuman that the assigned work was completed. Ram and Lakshman went to the queens to fulfill Hanuman’s promise. Sendra led Ram to her bedroom and Panaka took Lakshman away. When they sat on the cot, the cots broke down! The queens were miserable to see their clever trick resulting in a failure. Hanuman had fulfilled his promise, yet the queens could not kill Ram and Lakshman.

Ravan’s Lanka was guarded first by an ocean and then by Ahi and Mahi’s castle. Ram and Lakshman had overcome both the hurdles. They now marched toward Lanka. Vibhisan, Ravan’s brother, saw them and gave a word of advice to the King of Lanka, ‘Ram is a brave and expert fighter. He is the son of King Dashrath who was a great warrior. You know this well. Ram will easily defeat us. Besides, don’t you remember Mahadev’s words? He had said that Dashrath’s son, Ram, would take your life. Moreover, Ram and Lakshman will fight together. Do I have to tell you that he is Sesnag’s son, a snake child? And if this is not enough, Hanuman is with them, a wise, clever and mighty forest-dweller. Hanuman helped them build a bridge across the ocean, he found that Ahi and Mahi had abducted Ram and Lakshman and schemed the battle outside the temple to eliminate the unconquerable Ahi and Mahi. We have no idea how Hanuman and his monkey-men will fight. Let us surrender to Ram, or our family will be destroyed.’

As was his nature, Ravan replied stubbornly, ‘This is the time of war, and I think of fighting my opponents, not of surrendering to them. If you do not wish to join this war, you are free to make your choice. I am not scared of the outcome as it is written in my destiny.





Keep your advice for someone else.'



Meghnad was the leader of Ravan's soldiers, and Lakshman was the leader of the forest-dwellers. After a long and terrible battle Lakshman's arrow killed Meghnad.

Now Ravan himself came to the forefront. He knew well that Ram would kill him, but he had prepared himself for his end. He wanted to put up a brave fight and kill as many opponents as he could before dying. Lakshman was badly bruised when he waged a battle with Ravan. Then the King of Lanka shot an arrow straight at Lakshman, making him unconscious!

'Ram! My brother!' Lakshman cried before fainting. Ram, Hanuman, and Sugriva rushed to him. Devvansa came and found the unconscious Lakshman bleeding everywhere. She examined his wounds and said, 'A herb that grows on Ghurnagir will cure Lakshman. But we have very little time. Lakshman should be treated with the herb before the sun sets.'

Hanuman did not wait for further instructions. 'I will reach there in a moment and bring the herb with me,' saying this, Hanuman lifted himself and zoomed into the sky.

When he reached Ghurnagir, Hanuman found the mountain covered with herbs. Thousands of plants covered its slopes. Which herb was required to cure Lakshman? Hanuman was confused. After reflecting for a few moments, he made an easy decision. Hanuman lifted the entire mountain, leaped into the air and flew toward Lanka.

Hanuman was making his way through the clouds. Down from the earth below, Hanuman with the mountain in his hands, appeared frightening. After a while, when Hanuman reached the sky of Ayudha, Shasrat and Bharat saw something huge flying in the sky, as if invading the city. They remembered Ram's advice and the magical arrows he had given. They pulled out the arrow meant for





the enemy approaching from the sky and shot it toward Hanuman. The arrow hit Hanuman's left foot and the next moment, poor Hanuman came down, injured and bleeding. Shasrat and Bharat hastily came over and saw their enemy. Immediately, Hanuman introduced himself and explained Lakshman's condition.

Having heard the tragic tale, Bharat made Hanuman sit on the arrow and shot it toward Lanka. Within no time, the arrow landed on the battle ground. The appropriate herbs were given to Lakshman and he regained some strength. Ram advised him to take rest and then went to the battlefield to set upon his opponent. The memory of Mahadev's curse bothered Ravan and often in the middle of the battle, he saw his moment of defeat and death getting closer, but he did not give up. At last, Vibhisan went to Ram and revealed a secret—Ravan's death lay in his navel. Without wasting a moment, Ram targeted Ravan's naval. Ravan collapsed on the battlefield as the first arrow struck his naval! Immediately, his platoons fled in fear! The people of Lanka were shocked to hear about the death of their invincible king! Vibhisan became the new king of Lanka, the golden city.

Ram's rage subsided and he became calm after killing his arch enemy. He did not rush to see Sita but carefully viewed the disaster the war had brought upon. How a foolish man had destroyed a beautiful city! It takes centuries to create something beautiful but only moments to ruin it!

Hanuman was keen to break the news of Ram's victory to Sita. Along with Lakshman, he went to bring Sita to her husband. But Ram was lost in thoughts of right and wrong. Ravan, an inherently evil man, had abducted Sita, and in doing so he had dishonored her. In no way was Sita at fault, but now, as the husband of a disgraced woman, what should he do? Was it right to accept a woman who bore the stigma of having lived with Ravan? When Ram considered Sita's virtues, he realized that it was true that relinquishing the luxury of a palace, Sita had joined him in living the hard life of the forest.





Besides, he had married her. He had taken her as his wife after observing all the sacred rituals. He was bound to accept her.

After pondering over for a long time, Ram decided to test Sita. He asked her to walk through fire. If she was pure and clean, the God of Fire would cause her no harm, and she would walk through the flames unscathed. Sita quietly prepared herself for the test. All those who were present, including the forest-dwelling monkey-men, were silently crying at Sita's humiliation.

Sita implored God, 'I am honest and my heart and conduct have been loyal to Ram. When Ravan abducted me, he had forcefully touched my body. I have not committed sin in anyway. If I have been true to my husband, if I have always been virtuous, if I am pure, the fire will turn cold when I walk upon it. If I have sinned the fire will burn me. A powerless woman, I am submitting myself to you for the trial.'

Without hesitating any longer, Sita walked into the fire burning wildly. The flames were howling, scaring the people there. But when Sita was engulfed by the fire, the flames turned cold, soothing her body. After a while, when she emerged from the fire, even her clothes were untouched by the flames. Sita's face glowed with her righteousness.

With this ended the fourteen years of Ram's stay in the forest. Both the brothers and Sita, along with the forest-dwelling monkeys, returned to Ayudha. Shasrat and Bharat welcomed them.

Sita became a woman. She bled for the first time. After bleeding for five days, Sita went to the nearby river, took a bath and wore new clothes. She cooked a delicious meal for her beloved husband. She first served him and then ate herself. Night fell. Sita made the bed. Lying on the soft bed, Ram and Sita chatted for a long time. That night Sita conceived a child. She was happy as her life was now beautiful. Kaychaulya learnt why Ram and Sita seemed so happy. Was she jealous!

Not only was Ram now the king of Ayudha, but his life with





Sita was blooming with joy! The couple's happiness was unbearable to Kaykauchala, and as Dashrath was no more, Ram became the target of her wrath. After plotting for a long time, Kaykauchala hatched a cunning scheme. To stir Ram against his wife, Kaykauchala went to him and said that Sita still remembered her solitary life at Lanka. Without giving a thought to the allegation, Ram became infuriated at this betrayal and decided to abandon Sita in the forest.

Ram called Lakshman and instructed him to carry out the decision. Lakshman was hesitant to put this command into practice but could not argue with his angry elder brother. Lakshman went to meet Sita and after a while suggested that they should take a walk. The suggestion sounded strange to Sita as she had never gone out of the palace with Lakshman. Looking at Lakshman's face she understood that her relationship with the family was over. Sita started crying and prepared to leave the palace. She sat in Lakshman's chariot and it started moving toward the forest. Without uttering a word, Lakshman drove the chariot into the dense woods and stopped in the middle of it. Sita stepped out of the chariot crying and cursed her fate which had brought her to the forest once again.

Lakshman brought water in two coconut shells. He explained that the water of one shell was for washing Sita's face and the water of the other shell was for drinking. With tears in his eyes, Lakshman left Queen Sita in the dark forest, driving the chariot back to Ayudha. After weeping for a long time, tired and frustrated, Sita fell asleep. When she woke up, the sun had set and she was all alone in the forest. In the darkness she spilled water from both the shells. The trickling water turned into two rivulets. The rivulets became small rivers and the rivers gradually became big and wide, later they came to be known as Ganga and Jamuna.

Sita decided that she would not pity herself and lament her fate. She got up and started walking. After a while, she saw a small hut that belonged to Valmak, a blind ascetic. From her footfalls, the ascetic learnt that a woman had arrived at his door. He politely said, 'Come





in, dear daughter! I am blind and get to know things by the sounds around. If you want to live here in the forest, this hut will be your shelter. Do not worry about anything, and be happy with whatever god has given you.'

Sita was glad to find herself at the ascetic's hut and started living there. Her body performed its function and the cycle of growth continued. Days passed, weeks went by and months went past. Nine months and nine days were over. Sita experienced labour pain and fell on the ground, screaming in agony. Valmak called a midwife who helped Sita in childbirth.

Sita gave birth to a baby boy. Dancing with joy, blind Valmak said, 'Look at the magic of nature and god! They have given solace to the poor, lonely Sita! What a wonderful moment this is! What a lovely boy is born! This baby boy will be known as Kush.'

King Ram missed his wife. Knowing that he had deserted Sita at a critical time, Ram regretted his action. 'Why did I believe Kaykauchala?' he asked himself. But such speculation was meaningless since he could not undo what was already done. At last, Ram had realized that he had made a mistake in abandoning his wife. To forget his remorse, Ram immersed himself in serving his subjects. He took care that his actions made people happy and everyone around him was pleased with him.

Sita, still living in the forest, kept herself busy in daily chores, while Valmak took care of Kush. Once when Sita was going to fetch water from the river, she saw a female monkey jumping from one tree to another with its baby clinging around its neck. Shocked to see this, Sita said to the monkey, 'You stupid monkey! Why are you hopping around with such a young baby? What if your baby falls down?' The monkey, a quick-witted animal, immediately shot back, 'Many thanks for your advice but I must say that my baby is clung to my body, whereas yours is with a blind man. If a beast such as a tiger or a bear makes a meal of your baby, the ascetic will not even come to know what has happened to the little one. Even if he comes





to know about the beast, how will he fight it to save your child? Have you ever thought about this? Go back to the hut and take better care of your son.'

Sita realized that the monkey was correct and immediately returned to the hut. When she reached the hut, Sita saw that Valmak was nowhere near Kush. Sita picked her baby and started walking toward the river to fetch water.

After some time Valmak came where Kush had been lying and tried to stroke him. He felt around but did not find the boy anywhere. Valmak was scared, 'Where is the boy? If I don't find him, what will I tell Sita?'

Eventually, using his magical powers, Valmak changed a small sapling of the *lahu* tree into a boy as old as Kush. When Sita returned she saw from a distance that the blind ascetic was holding a baby in his hands! She asked him, 'Father! Whose baby is this? Kush is with me. How come there is another boy in the hut?'

Valmak was bewildered to hear this. Crying, he narrated the entire episode to Sita and explained how the other boy had come into existence. What was done was done. Valmak could not turn the boy into a sapling again. He convinced Sita that she should raise the boys together. 'The way Ram and Lakshman were inseparable, these two boys will also love each other and live well,' Valmak advised. He named the boy Lahu.

Days passed. Weeks and months passed. Years went by. Lahu and Kush lived like brothers, playing with bows and arrows made by Valmak.

One day Lahu and Kush wandered into the garden of Ayudha, where Lakshman noticed them playing with bows and arrows. He asked them about their parents. The boys replied innocently, 'Sita is our mother and she is our father!'

Tears welled in Lakshman's eyes. He embraced the boys and sent them back to the forest. Later, he told the story of Lahu and Kush to Ram. Ram was delighted to hear this. People saw Ram smiling







after many years. Ram sent Hanuman into the forest to look for Sita and her sons.

The moment Sita saw Hanuman, she started crying but refused to return to Ram. Hanuman persuaded her to come back to Ayudha but Sita was obstinate in her refusal to return to the family.

In Ayudha, Ram kept waiting for Sita but he did not see her. He went to the forest to meet his wife. Sita sensed that Ram was in the forest looking for her. She pleaded the earth, 'I never committed a sin, neither by thinking ill about someone nor by speaking harsh words. I have not committed a sin by harming anyone. I have always treated Ram as my husband and I have always been true to him. In spite of that I have suffered injustice in my life. Mother Earth! If I am pure and innocent, give me a way to return to you. Please accept me!'

In a moment a thunderous sound was heard. The earth parted before Sita and she walked into its hollow space. After Sita became invisible in the dark cavern, the earth became whole again.

*Let the forgotten or mistaken words get back to me in dreams. Let the words I spoke reverberate in the air. This tale has been sung by Ramu Chaudhari, son of Ratan Chaudhari, who lives in Pimpalghodi village of Dang and by Bandya Gangurde, son of Jiva Gangurde, who lives in Sendriamba.*







# Oral Narratives





## Tale of Satimata

(Narrator: Jivalyabhai of Ankhal village in Dang district of Gujarat)

*Oh god, what may I do, what may I do, now?*

*It is an occasion to celebrate, jigana ji...*

*Tell me, what may I do?*

*Oh god, guide me on my way,*

*It is an occasion to celebrate, jigana ji...*

This is the city of Dwarka, the Kailash mountain, Dholasagar—the city of gods. At present, the assembly of gods is engrossed in a serious discussion.

*They deliberate and discuss,*

*Yet again they discuss and*

*Once again they deliberate.*

They have gathered there to confer. The gods said, 'Call Saydev, ask him to read from his books.' Saydev came, pored over the huge scrolls for a long time, and finally said, 'You should invite Satimata to Dholavira.'

*The gods deliberate and discuss*

*Yet again they discuss and*

*Once again they deliberate.*

*yava jigana jigana ji re,*

*ji...ji...ji...*





The gods thought, 'Whom should we send to bring Satimata? Who will come forward to do this?'

Narandev said, 'I will go.' Baramdev said, 'I will join him.' They got ready and set out at once. They walked a long way. Narandev led the way, Baramdev followed him, and thus they arrived at the place of Jugadharimata.

*Jugadharimata greeted the guests, dear sisters,  
She showed them seats to be at ease, sisters,  
yava jigana jigana ji re,  
ji...ji...ji...*

Jugadharimata, Narandev and Baramdev sat down.

'Jugadharimata! Mother! You are the soul. We are merely made of ash,' the gods said. She served them a jugful of water. They quenched their thirst.

'Respected brothers, please sit down and tell me why you have come all the way to my place. What has made you come to this forest?'

*The gods deliberate and discuss  
Yet again they discuss and  
Once again they deliberate  
yava jigana jigana ji re,  
ji...ji...ji...*

Jugadharimata said, 'Who am I? Jugadharimata. Who am I? An earthly mother. Who am I? A mortal woman. You are divine, you have come a long way. Something important must have brought you here. Tell me, respected brothers, what is it?'

*Call Satimata, dear sister,  
Call Satimata, dear sister,  
yava jigana jigana ji re,  
ji...ji...ji...*





‘Jugadharimata! We have come to take Satimata with us. We will take her to Dholavira. Please inform her about it.’

Satimata began preparations for the journey. She heated some water, added cold water to it and went to take bath in the backyard. She unpinned her hair and spread them loose over her shoulders. She took off all her ornaments.

*Mother is keeping a watch around, dear sister,  
Mother is keeping a watch around, dear sister,  
yava jigana jigana ji, re  
ji...ji...ji...*

While Satimata was taking her bath, Mahasati kept watch. Satimata washed herself and started putting on her clothes. She draped a *pitambar* around her waist. She wore pearls in her hair and put a diamond in her navel. A ring glowed on her nose and anklets rang around her feet. Chains tinkled around her elbows and neck. Bangles on her hands, a *bindi* on the forehead and flowers in her braid completed the elaborate make-up.

Satimata and Mahasati came out. Mahasati introduced Satimata to Narandev and Baramdev, and along with Satimata they walked toward Dwarka.

*She trudges on the way, dear,  
Mahasati's lovely daughter,  
She trudges on the way, dear,  
Satimata, who is a divine woman.*

Walking with a graceful gait, Satimata looked divine in her beauty. Narandev led the way, Satimata followed him and Baramdev was the last of the travelling trio. On the way, Narandev said, ‘Baramdev, I am tired. I want to take a nap for a while on this rock. You should go ahead.’

Baramdev and Satimata continued their journey through the forest. Twelve months passed, but they were still somewhere in the





thick forest.

Meanwhile, in Dholavira, Saydev opened his scrolls. He went through the words once again. He bestowed one lakh souls to Dwarka and the same number of souls to Dholavira. Correct? Yes, correct.

Narandev and Baramdev had not returned with Satimata as yet. Baramdev said to Satimata, 'We must get ready to go to Kailash tomorrow.' Satimata made all the preparations. She took the scrolls and carried them on her head. Baramdev and Satimata ambled off toward south.

*Off they went to south, dear,  
Through the lonely forest they went, dear,  
It is an occasion to celebrate  
jigana ji...ji...ji...*

In the middle of the journey, they came across a lonely forest. There they came upon a green pasture with a river flowing nearby. Satimata said, 'Baramdev, I want to take bath in the river. Keep this scroll in your lap and wait for a while.'

Satimata took her bath, put on her clothes and set off on the journey again.

*She kept walking, on and on,  
Satimata you are jigana ji...  
God too kept walking, on and on, jigana ji...*

Once it was night time. It was pitch dark all around. Crickets were singing their shrill song. Satimata and Baramdev were all alone in the thick forest. Now?

Satimata said to Baramdev, 'What shall we do, brother? I am scared. The forest is full of foxes, hyenas, leopards and bears. I feel afraid. I am trembling with fear. What shall we do now?'

Baramdev made two beds with a fair distance in between and replied, 'My sister that is your bed. I will relax here, on this bed.'

The night was passing at a swift pace. Crickets were singing in







an incessant melody, the stars were twinkling, the foxes were squealing, the hyenas were laughing, the leopards were roaring and the innocent, harmless beasts were wailing. Only the first phase of the night was over. There were three more dark phases for dawn to break.

‘Brother, are you asleep?’

‘No, sister, I cannot sleep.’

‘How can one get sleep in this dark, weird night?’

‘Can you move a bit closer? I am scared.’

Baramdev moved closer to Satimata’s bed.

Two phases passed by. Two more dark phases remained for dawn to break. Stars glowed. The peace of the speeding night was disturbed by the roaring lions, bears and leopards.

‘Brother, are you asleep?’

‘No sister, I can’t sleep.’

‘I am scared, please come closer.’

Baramdev shifted his bed closer.

More time passed away. A strange medley of voices filled the darkness. Suddenly, a deer leaped from between the beds. A leopard followed it. Satimata started trembling. Fear choked her voice. She could not even scream. Satimata jumped and embraced Baramdev. She was trembling violently.

‘Brother ! Brother ! I am scared.’

She was still trembling.

It was the hour of midnight in the dark forest. Two youthful bodies, a man and a woman. Frightening darkness, roaring wild animals and...

As if time had come to a standstill. As if time had lost its senses. Time demolished the barriers of restrain.

A man, a woman. A dark forest. Alone in the forest at the hour of midnight. A woman. A man. They lost control and succumbed to their senses. Then they slept through the night as if in a trance.





And after the deep sleep, a beautiful morning. It was a bright morning. Neither Satimata nor Baramdev uttered a word about what had occurred the previous night. They behaved as if everything was usual.

*The child grew within, dear,  
Satimata, your child grew within,  
Satimata, you are jigana ji...*

One day passed into two. Two days turned into three, three days became four and five and six and then six days became a week. A week turned into a fortnight and then a month and then another month. One month became two, two months became three, three became four and then turned to five, six, seven, eight and then to nine. The child kept growing.

*What may I do now god...?  
It is a time of joy jigana ji...  
What may I do now god...?  
It is a time of joy jigana ji...*

Nine months and nine days were over. The child was now fully grown. The child moved. It was night. Satimata was taking rest. The child moved. It stretched its hands and legs, moved its head and pushed itself.

Satimata looked around, searched for a clean place and there the child was born. It was a girl.

*In the lonely forest  
The child cried, dear, it cried inconsolably  
In the lonely forest  
The child cried, dear, it cried inconsolably.*

Satimata fed the child. Baramdev and Satimata went ahead on their journey. Satimata started crying.

*What may I do now, mother?*





*It is a time of joy jigana ji...*

*What may I do now god?*

*It is a time of joy jigana ji...*

They reached the outskirts of Dholavira. There was a staircase there. Satimata followed Baramdev with the child in her hands and the scroll on her head. They started to climb the staircase. On the sixth step, Baramdev stopped, turned back and said, 'Sister, what shall we do with this girl...? If they enquire about her parents, what shall we say?'

'What then...?'

'We will have to think of a way out...'

'What shall we do?'

'Let us abandon the girl in the forest.'

'What...!'

'Yes. We will have to leave her in the forest.'

'May I ask you a question, brother?'

'Go on.'

'Men do not have any idea of how attached a woman is to her child. This girl is like my mother to me. How can I throw her away?'

'You are right. But what shall we say to the gods in Dholavira, when asked about the child? How did you get her?, they will ask us. Then?'

Satimata could not reply. In the meanwhile Baramdev snatched the girl from Satimata's hands. 'Wind, water, beasts, insects, nothing at all will touch her. She will grow up without any difficulty,' saying thus, Baramdev hurled the girl into the dense forest.



The abandoned child started to weep. The peaceful forest was disturbed by the cries of the girl. Mahadev heard the cry and wondered, 'Who is crying in this lonely forest?'





He went and searched through the forest. He found a baby girl crying. Mahadev felt pity for her. Mahadev thought, 'Who could do such a disgusting act? Who could be so cruel?'

Mahadev was compassionate. He decided to do something for the child. He measured a certain distance with four steps on one side and four steps on the other side of the land and built a hut for the child. The hut had seven doors and nine windows. At the threshold of the hut, he built a thatch to protect the girl from sunlight and at the back, a small plot for the kitchen garden.

*This is a hut for you, mother,  
A small and nice hut, mother,  
This is a hut for you, mother,  
A small and nice hut, mother.*

The girl started growing. Satimata, the daughter of Mahasati; Devsati, the daughter of Satimata. Devsati began to grow up alone in the lonely forest, all alone.

Meanwhile, Baramdev and Satimata reached Dholavira with the scrolls. Mahasati had already reached there. Satimata remained morose and brooding. She was not enthusiastic about her new surroundings. She was not eager to participate in any activity. She was often found with tears in her eyes. She was dejected and restless. The jovial girl of the past now remained tense as if she was worried about something.

Mahasati said, 'Dear, tell me. What is wrong with you? Why don't you talk to me? What is your problem? Why do you remain silent and aloof? Tell me the truth. I'm your mother.'

'No mother. Everything is alright. I am fine.'

'You are not fine. You are not alright. You are perplexed and worried about something. Tell me the truth.'

'No, no, it is not so.' Satimata insisted.

One day Vadhu Kunkna came to Devsati's hut while wandering





in the forest. He gave the seed of a golden gourd to Devsati. Devsati planted the seed. Every day, without fail, she watered the seed.

Days passed by. Nights passed by. Devsati watered the seed every day. A shoot sprang from the seed. A creeper grew out of the shoot. One leaf on the first day, second on the second day and gradually sixteen leaves grew in sixteen days. A flower blossomed on the seventeenth day. And with the flower a tiny gourd also grew on it.

The gourd developed fully. It was a golden gourd with golden light, illuminating the surrounding area.



King Nahvati ruled over the city of Nahvatpur. He had two queens, Avadatan and Nivadatan.

Surya was the minister of Nahvatpur.

Both the queens once insisted on sending the king and his minister for hunting.

*Oh gods! You are great,  
Oh heavenly deities you are indeed great!*

King Nahvati and Surya, his minister, set out for adventure. Both went out on their galloping horses.

During these days, Mahadev and Narandev started to assess the territory of Dholavira. Mahadev and Narandev went toward the east. Nahvati and his minister Surya were on the western side.

*The gods wander in the forest, dear,  
My child you are jigana ji...  
The gods wander in the forest, dear,  
My Mother, you are jigana ji...*

On the way, Mahadev felt thirsty, hungry and tired. One can ignore a tired body, one can ignore a hungry stomach, but one cannot ignore a thirsty tongue.





‘Narandev, whatever happens, go wherever you have to, but bring me some water. I’m thirsty, get me some water. I cannot move an inch, even my speech is failing. I’ll die without water, do something, please.’

Narandev climbed a nearby hill. East and west, north and south—he surveyed all directions with his eyes, but the forest seemed endless. Narandev looked everywhere, but no sign of a water reservoir was visible. Then, on the western side, he noticed a golden aura. He saw a jet of golden light. He went to the illuminated place with Mahadev. There was a hut there, with a garden in front. In the garden, on a creeper, hung a golden gourd with a golden halo around it.

Mahadev and Narandev went to the hut. Devsati was standing at the door.

‘We are thirsty. Please give us some water to drink.’

Devsati looked at them and said, ‘I don’t have water in my hut. But I will show you the way to a pond. Please follow me.’

Devsati led them. Narandev followed her with Mahadev behind, dragging along the way. Mahadev was ogling at the gourd. He had forgotten his thirst, hunger and fatigue. Yet he had to push himself quite unwillingly, along with Devsati and Narandev. Mahadev quenched his thirst. They returned to the hut.

Mahadev said, ‘Narandev, whatever happens, at any cost, we will take away this gourd. With the help of this gourd, we will turn Dholavira into a golden city.’

Scheming in their mind, they came close to the creeper. Mahadev said, ‘Narandev, climb up the nearby tree and pluck the gourd from the creeper. Throw the gourd down, I’ll catch it.’

Narandev said, ‘No, no, it would be unfair, Mahadev. You are the supreme among all gods. You fulfill everyone’s wish, whether it is for wealth or food; you provide everyone with all things. I am not only younger to you, I’m lesser to you in every respect. I will sit down, you should stand upon me and pluck the gourd. I’ll catch





it and immediately run away.’

Narandev sat on the ground. Mahadev stood upon him. No sooner did Mahadev touch the golden gourd than Devsati came out.

‘Oh, god! What is happening? You are stealing from my garden...? I have been so hospitable to you! I gave you water to drink, and now you are playing tricks upon me...? This isn’t your gourd, nor does it belong to your father. It belongs to Vadhu Kunkna. It could be of his son, daughter, father or his mother. This gourd could well go to Vadhu Kunkna’s woman. It is certainly not yours. Have you ever given me anything to eat? Have you ever given me anything to drink? Have you ever helped me in any way? Come now, get lost...Otherwise I’ll...’

The gods took flight and made off to Dholavira. Due to their hasty escape, Narandev’s *dhoti* slipped off. Poor, naked god did not wait to pick the dhoti to cover his loins. Mahadev’s *topi* flew off. He too did not waste a moment to pick up the *topi* and fled quickly with his bare, bald head.

They returned to Dholavira. Parvati noticed the bare, bald head of Mahadev and asked,

‘Oh Mahadev, my god, where is your *topi*...?’

‘It is in Dwarka.’

‘Which Dwarka?’

‘It must be somewhere in Dwarka.’

‘Which Dwarka? Indra’s Dwarka...? Sendra’s Dwarka...? Saydev’s Dwarka...? In the Dev Dwarka...? In the original Dwarka...? In the dark Dwarka...? In the island of Dwarka...? In white Dwarka...? In Jejuri Dwarka...? Which Dwarka are you talking about?’

Mahadev replied that he couldn’t recall where he had forgotten his *topi*. Mahadev was trapped in an awkward situation. He could not enjoy his food or relish his drink. He felt restless. He turned blind to everything around—Parvati, his home, Dholavira. The golden gourd ruled his mind, everything else became meaningless.





One day passed, two days passed, three days passed and at last, on the fourteenth day he felt some relief. He called Parvati and asked her to sit beside him.

‘Parvati, come here, sit down and listen to me.’

Parvati sat beside Mahadev.

‘Parvati! A girl stays in the lonely forest. Her name is Devsati. In the garden of her courtyard, a golden gourd has grown on a creeper. A halo of golden light comes from that gourd. I am obsessed with that gourd. I went there to pluck it but the girl didn’t allow me, and drove me out. Narandev lost his dhoti while we were running away and he had to come back naked. My topi flew off and I came away with a bare head. Now I think that you should go there and get that golden gourd for me.’

Parvati went into the lonely forest. She went to the hut and called out authoritatively, ‘Whose house is this...?’

Devsati was at home.

‘Sister, pray sit. I will be there in a moment to receive you,’ Devsati replied from inside. Parvati did not take a seat and waited at the threshold.

‘You! The supreme goddess Parvati, how come you are here at my doorstep? Please be seated.’

‘I am not here to sit at leisure. I have come to ask you for something.’

‘I’ll give away anything you ask for if it is within my means. Without fail, I’ll serve you.’

‘I want the golden gourd.’

‘It is not mine. I cannot give it away.’

Parvati coaxed her, tempted her for wealth, threatened her, and even tortured her mentally. But everything failed. Devsati was firm in her decision. She refused to give in.

Parvati returned to Dholavira, disheartened without the golden gourd. Mahadev started thinking about this young woman, ‘Who







is she, living all alone in the forest? Which Sati is she?' He called for Saydev. Saydev pored over his scrolls, 'Mahadev, she is Devsati. She is the daughter of Baramdev and Satimata.'

'What! Daughter of Baramdev and Satimata!'

'Yes, try to recollect what had happened a few years ago. You had built a hut for a newborn baby girl... Do you remember?'

'Yes, I do remember. But that girl...?'

'Yes, she is Devsati.'

'Saydev, read further, what is in her destiny? She has harassed me greatly and now I now want to take revenge.'

'Mahadev, her fate reveals that she will become a queen one day.'

'What? A queen! I will see to it that she becomes my servant.'

Mahadev resolved to devastate the life of the girl for whom he had built a hut, the girl who had made Narandev and Mahadev run away shamefully, the girl because of whom Mahadev had become bedridden for fourteen days.



One day Vadhu Kunkna came to Devsati's hut, 'Devsati, please return my gourd.'

'Who are you?'

'I am Vadhu Kunkna.'

'Which Vadhu...? There are several kinds of Vadhus. Are you the one who stays on the banks of a river...? Are you the one who stays on a mountain...? Are you one who stays on a rock? Are you a Vadhu who stays at a canal, or are you a Vadhu who stays in a garden? Tell me, which Vadhu you are?'

'I am the true, original Vadhu.'

'Okay,' Devsati said, 'Take the gourd. It is yours.'

Mahadev came to Devsati's hut. As soon as he reached there he looked all around for the gourd. It wasn't there. The creeper had





wilted. Mahadev became panicky.

*God got to know, he did get to know,  
Oh my God, you are jigana ji...  
God cried and wept, cried and wept,  
Oh my God, you are jigana ji...*

Mahadev started weeping, ‘Oh Lord, what has come upon me? The gourd, that beautiful golden gourd is lost. Who took it away?’

Devsati said, ‘He took it away to whom it belonged. You have nothing to do with the gourd. Go away.’

Mahadev went to Dholavira again. He called Saydev. Saydev opened his book and tried to trace the gourd.

He searched across the eastern continent, the continent of the sun, the continent of the moon, the continent of the stars. But in vain. Again he looked for the gourd in the continent of Ram, in the continent of Gujarat. He looked in Gadhlanka, in the Dandak forest and in the continent of the Marathas. He could not see the gourd anywhere.

They moved southwards. There they saw Mandavgadh. Near Mandavgadh, there is a village named Toranvera. A Vadhu family dwelt in that village.

‘God Mahadev, there is a Vadhu Kunkna in Toranvera. But the gourd is not with him. It is broken to pieces and buried in the ground.’

Mahadev was now very angry with Devsati. Mahadev flew to the forest, landed on the ground and disguised himself as a sage. He grew a beard, wore a pitambar and went to the hut holding a staff and a *kamandal* in his hands. He also wore a *rudraksh mala*.

‘Sati, you are Devsati, Kukvisati, Sendrisati, Haldisati, Tambasati, Rupasati, Sonasati. Will you come with me? I am very old. Will you fetch water for me and work at my house?’

Sati got ready. Her dazzling beauty was incomparable. Even the sun would pale in her presence. Mahadev went ahead and Devsati





followed. Both reached the city of Dwarka.

They entered into the city. From there they went to Dev Dwarka and finally to Dholavira. Looking at the beautiful young lady, Parvati said, 'Mahadev, you are the supreme god, the one who rules the world. You have brought a young woman along with you! Are you not ashamed of yourself?'

'Listen to me Parvati, this young lady is Devsati. She lived by herself in the forest. She will do all our household work. Show her a corner to sleep at night.'

Parvati gave Devsati a golden vessel to fetch water. She gave her a silver *indhoni*. Devsati started doing household work at Mahadev's place.

One day passed, two days passed, four days passed and thus fourteen days passed by. Mahadev was happy to see Devsati drudging as a servant in his home. On the fifteenth day he said to Devsati, 'Take your bath and get ready. I will give you a word of advice. For how long will you stay with us...? Go now, I will show you your place...'

Devsati took a bath, sought blessings of all the gods including Mahadev. In a moment, Mahadev threw her back into the forest.

A leather tanner stayed in the forest. Devsati went to him, 'Who are you?' he asked Devsati.

'Brother, I am homeless. I will do all your household work, eat whatever you offer, and sleep in a corner.'

The tanner gave her a vessel, 'Go to the river and fetch water. Pour the water into this pit here.'

It was a large pit. The tanner had kept animal hides in the pit. The pit was stinking. But Devsati ignored the stench. She remained calm. She went to the river, filled water and poured it into the pit.

Mahadev was very happy. She was a woman destined to become a queen. What a queen she was! A queen serving a tanner? A queen rotting in a hut!





One day King Nahvati of Nahvatpur and his minister, Surya, were wandering in the forest. By chance they got separated.

King Nahvati felt thirsty. Looking for water, he came to the river where Devsati had come to fetch water.

Devsati, a divine beauty, was standing by the riverside with her vessel.

King Nahvati forgot his thirst. Devsati looked at him.

‘I wish to drink water,’ the king said.

‘You should drink water first from the river. For if I touch the water it will become impure as I am a tanner.’

King Nahvati looked at Devsati. How could she be an untouchable?

‘Above all, you are a human being. You look divine. You are the true Jagadamba. Your touch will make sacred anything that is impure. You are certainly not an untouchable. Please pour water in my hands, I’ll drink it.’

Devsati filled her vessel with water. King Nahvati drank the water from Devsati’s vessel.

Devsati and Nahvati fell in love with each other. King Nahvati took Devsati to Nahavatpura. There, he married Devsati and took her to his palace. Thus Devsati became a queen. Even Mahadev could not change Devsati’s destiny.





## King Mansinha and Queen Salvan

First, I bow to Goddess Saraswati, Mahadevguru is the second one to whom I bow; I then bow to Saydev and Indradev, I bow to Saptashrungi Goddess, Gaondevi, Mother Cow, Seemdev, the God of the Mountains, the Goddess of the Mountains, Ghatadev and Chhatadev.

I bow to the Pole star, to the people of my village, the village itself, to the divine earth, the age of Kali and the God of Death. After all the deities, I pay my homage to the ghosts, witches and spirits. Make a horse of a pestle, tail of a broom, cross twelve roads and twelve crossroads.

My god! I am an innocent child of yours, I am here to tell a tale and hope to be pardoned for any mistake that I may make while narrating the story.

The city of Joshingpur was ruled by King Joshinga; Joshingavati was the queen and prince Mansinha was their son. The king, the queen and the prince lived a comfortable and happy life.

Three of the four phases of the night were over, only one phase remained. The cock cried at dawn. The bright light of the sun caressed the earth, illuminating the eight continents of Kashi and all the nine continents of the earth.

The birds and the beasts woke up. The grocers opened their account books and the brahmans became engrossed in their sacred books. Queen Joshingavati got up, took her bath and began her daily





chores. She took a golden pot and went to fetch water. She prepared food, using milk and butter. Then she woke up her husband and son.

The king took his bath, worshipped the idols of gods and paid homage to his guru. They all relished the delicious food and satiated their hunger with tasty delicacies.

King Joshinga went to the court. His subjects said, 'Listen to us, O King, you have received the honourable position of a king due to the pious deeds in your previous birth. You are a king now, but you have been heedless to the needs of your people. We honour each and every word uttered from the throne, but you do not care for our sentiments.'

The king found this a senseless babbling. 'Look now, I am feeling sleepy,' he said, and walked away.

*Now it was the time of night,  
Mother, you are jigana ji...  
The king ate his dinner, dear  
It is a moment of joy, jigana ji...*

The queen cleaned the kitchen, prepared three beds and they all went to sleep. Three out of the four phases of the night were over, only one phase remained. The cock sang his song of the dawn. Bright rays of the sun caressed the earth, illuminating the eight continents of Kashi and all the nine continents of the earth.

It was morning. The queen took her bath, cleaned the house and fetched water in the golden pot.

Mansinha said, 'Listen to me mother, listen to me, father! You have looked after me for all these years, but now I am old enough to go hunting. Please give me bow and a quiver of arrows.'

The king gave him a bow and arrows. Mansinha went to the forest with his weapons.

*Mansinha hunts and hounds,  
It is a moment of joy, jigana ji...*





*In the lonely forest,  
Mansinha pierces sparrows and birds, jigana ji...*

There were flowers. There were sparrows. The sparrows perched on the flowers: one, two and three. There were three flowers and three sparrows. Mansinha got ready with his bow and arrows. He shot arrows at the sparrows and they all fell to the ground. Mansinha picked up his kill, tied the sparrows in a cloth and returned to Joshingpur.

‘Mother, please give me a glass of water. I am feeling thirsty, hungry and tired.’ The Queen gave him water to drink. Mansinha quenched his thirst.

Many days passed by. Everyday Mansinha brought home a few sparrows. The Queen said, ‘Listen, Mansinha, why do you bring such small birds? My fingertips get charred roasting them. Kill big animals.’

The queen cooked the sparrows. After paying their homage to the guru and gods, they relished the delicious food.

It was night time. They made their beds.

Then it was morning. The queen woke up. She prepared lunch. She made many rotlas. She woke up Mansinha. Mansinha got ready for his journey. He took the rotlas along with his bow and the quiver. He set out to hunt in the dark forest.

*Mansinha is exploring the forest, my dear,  
My mother, you are jigana ji...*

The forest was dense with huge trees. It was thickly sylvan and very stony. Mansinha crossed thick bushes, thorny roads, stony paths, several valleys, and a large ground but there was no end to the forest. Moreover, he could not see a single sign of a living animal. Neither any small nor big creature crossed his way.

Mansinha went to the Shehu sea. From there he visited the milky lake. He thought that animals would visit the lake to quench





their thirst and so he stopped there. 'Why should I wander about in the forest? It is better that I wait here,' he thought.

Mansinha built a small support at the base of a tree. He sat there and waited for a peacock, a tiger, a lion, a fox, a deer or a stag to come to the lake.

Night was fading quickly. Three phases of the night were over. The prince waited but not a single animal turned up at the lake.



The city of Saudegadh was ruled by King Saudi. Saude was his queen and their daughter's name was Salvan. Salvan thought very highly of herself. She was an extremely beautiful and elegant woman. She said to the king and queen, 'Listen to me mother, listen to me father! I am going to fetch water at the milky lake in the Tambe forest.'

She walked in her graceful gait as if floating on the earth. Her anklets were jingling as she carried her golden pot. Even the earth stirred when Salvan's lovely feet touched it.

It was a quiet night. The jingling sound of Salvan's anklets drifted in the breeze. Mansinha wondered, 'Who could it be? What could it be? Could it be a thief? Could it be a bird? Is it a ghost? An evil spirit? Could it be a bear? An elephant? A tiger or a leopard? Who is moving around?'

Salvan washed the pot in the water. She filled the pot with water, poured the water back into the lake and filled it again. The pot gurgled.

Mansinha thought, 'This is the gurgling sound of water in a pot. This is neither a ghost nor a spirit. This is neither an animal, nor a bird. This must be a human being. Someone has come to fetch water.'

Mansinha rushed to the lake. Salvan had just turned and was walking away with the pot. Mansinha followed her. He started running so that he could speak to Salvan. He ran very fast but Salvan evaded him. At last he clasped her saree and clung to her waist.







Salvan was unperturbed. She had a pot full of water on her head and a strong youth on her waist. Yet, jingling her anklets, Salvan walked on.

She stopped at the door of the turtle. Salvan turned around swiftly. Mansinha lost his grip and fell. Salvan went home.

She said to her parents, 'Listen to me mother, listen to me father! I think someone is hungry in the lonely forest. Someone is thirsty. What can we do to help him?'

The King said, 'We shall call him here, give him food to eat and water to drink.' Salvan advised her father with a smiling face, 'Okay, please go and search for a man lying at the door of the turtle.'

On meeting Mansinha, King Saudi inquired, 'Who are you, young man?'

'I am Mansinha, Prince of Joshingpur, Son of King Joshinga and Queen Joshingavati.'

'What were you doing in the lonely forest?'

'I had come to hunt. But I am myself pierced by arrows.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean to say that I am conquered by your daughter. I am in love with your daughter. I wish to marry her.'

'Young man, life is not a game of hunting, it is not mere gallantry. How can you feel so in your very first meeting with my daughter?'

Salvan too started laughing, 'Young man, marriage is not a game of hunting, it is not gallantry. But as you are so keen, I will marry you on one condition.'

'What is it that you ask for? Please tell me.'

'Go to Joshingpur. Build a palace of seven floors. It should have nine rooms on each floor and each room should have nine windows and nine doors. Build a *pandal* from Joshingpur to Saudegadh and then spread a carpet from Saudegadh to Joshingpur. After completing this task, you may come to marry me with proper festivities. But all the work should be over before dawn. If the cock cries before the





work is completed, you will have to forget me forever. Okay?’

‘Yes, certainly. Listen to me Salvan, please be ready with elaborate make up for the wedding ceremony. I will be here before the cock sings his song.’

King Joshinga and Queen Joshingavati eagerly awaited Mansinha’s return. The prince had not returned from his adventurous voyage. Finally, Mansinha appeared.

‘Where is the kill?’

‘Well, today’s kill is big. No, no, the hunter himself has succumbed to the arrows of his kill.’

‘Dear prince, why are you vague about your adventure? Tell us what happened.’

‘Mother! Father! Princess Salvan of Saudegadth has vanquished me. I wish to marry her. But she has put up a challenge to me. I can marry her only if I can build a palace of seven floors within a single night. The palace should have nine large rooms, and each room should have nine doors and nine windows. I have to build a pandal and spread a carpet between Joshingpur and Saudegadth. Only then will she marry me. The task should be completed within a night before the cock’s cry announces the break of dawn. If I fail, I will lose her.’

The king called a troop of artisans. Carpenters started cutting and shaping wood, the masons started arranging bricks, and walls began to be painted. Everyone worked ceaselessly, not taking even a moment’s rest. An entire troop of singers motivated the artisans with a rhythmic cry.

The first floor with nine rooms each with nine windows and nine doors was ready. Then the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seven floors were ready. The huge palace was painted and bright lights lit up the splendid palace. A large group of workers built a pandal up to Saudegadth and spread a carpet up to Joshingpur.

Only two phases of the night were over.





Mansinha went to Saudegadh with great pomp and stopped at the door of the turtle. Salvan and her parents were in a deep midnight slumber. They had not expected Mansinha to reach Saudegadh before dawn. Reluctantly, Salvan began her elaborate makeup; anklets jingled on her feet, a diamond glowed in her naval, a bindi shone on her forehead, a necklace of diamonds and flowers adorned her neck. Her hair was fragrant with the flowers in her braid.

People were spellbound by her beauty.

The drummers and the *shehnai* players became busy, playing music. The singers sang songs of celebration.

The ritual began and Salvan half-heartedly went through it. Dawn had broken by the time the wedding ended. The cock sang its morning song. The sun's rays caressed the earth. Eight continents of Kashi and all the nine continents of the earth were illuminated. It was morning. Mansinha returned with his procession, now enriched with the presence of Salvan. People showered flowers on the newly-wedded couple.

The Queen welcomed Mansinha and Salvan. The couple began living in the new palace. The village headman invited them for lunch. They returned from the headman's place and rested for a while. Mansinha got thirsty.

'Dear, bring me some water to drink.'

Salvan gave a glass of water to her husband but she turned her back to him; while handing over the glass, she hid her face. She was crying.

'My queen, is this how you were trained by your mother?'

'You are wedded to my body but my soul is not with you. I am not happy with you. You wanted water, so I have brought water for you, if you do not want it, put it aside.'

Days passed, nights passed, eight months passed by. The conjugal life of the royal couple had not yet begun. No one knew of the reality. To all others, they seemed to be cheerful, but they were very unhappy.





After eight months Prince Mansinha took a long staff and headed for Saudegadh. He was excited and angry. Through dust, thorns and stones along the path, he walked taking long strides.

The Queen saw her son-in-law. She picked up a broom and cleaned her home.

‘Welcome, my son, be seated.’

‘Mother, father, I have not come to relax. I just wish to ask you a question.’

‘What is it?’

‘What kind of training have you given to your daughter? She does not know how to behave with others.’

‘Dear son, please calm down. I have prepared her well. She is educated, intelligent and wise. You simply have to excite her dormant spirit. Fill her with a zeal for life. Keep her happy. Bodily pleasures do not matter much to her. Flesh and blood mean nothing to her. Win her heart, and she will be yours. She will submit to you completely. As you are here, and you have asked me about my daughter, I will tell you something. I am not a witch, nor do I know black magic. I have educated Salvan well. Go now and wake up sharp at midnight. Observe Salvan’s behaviour at night. But do not suspect her character. Interpret the happenings according to your ability, but do not misunderstand her, do not act in haste. You may go now.’

Mansinha turned back with a heavy heart. Up in the sky there are flowers. On the ground below there are stones. There are thorns. Are there thorns in the flowers? Or are there flowers in the thorns? What is life? Is life a bed of flowers with a few thorns or is it a prickly path with some colourful flowers? How long will this go on? If one is bound to die, what is the meaning of such a life?

Mansinha returned home. He waited for nightfall. He had never felt so anxious before, not even on the first night with his wife. ‘When will it be dark,’ he thought, ‘and when will I come to know the true





nature of Salvan?’

The city of Dwarka is the seat of gods. The assembly of gods is held to discuss various issues at hand. All the deities had gathered there—Indra, Sendra, Saydev, Mahadev and others. The *apsaras* were dancing before the gods but their dance was graceless and the *apsaras* appeared lethargic. They were dancing merely for the sake of it, their heart was not in the dance.

The gods ordered, ‘Eba, Jheba, get ready. Go to Joshingpura city, bring Princess Salvan here.’

Prince Mansinha was lying at the door. He was wide awake with curiosity burning in his eyes. His eyes did not even blink. He was eager to see Salvan’s movements.

The chariot arrived at the courtyard of the seven-storey palace. Eba and Jheba stepped down. Indra and Sendra too got down. They came close to the door and called for Salvan.

‘Listen! O Queen! We are here.’

Mansinha thought, ‘These people certainly do not look like thieves. They do not seem to be licentious people who have come to indulge in an orgy. If that were the case, they would come and go stealthily. They would not call out so loudly.’

Salvan answered from inside the palace, ‘Listen to me, O gods, do not be very loud, my husband will wake up. He is sleeping right at the doorstep. Cross him and come inside but do not make noise.’

God Indra and Sendra entered the house. Eba and Jheba waited back in the chariot.

The Queen got ready, doing elaborate make-up. She floated out of the palace with a graceful gait. Her ornaments illuminated the dark night.

Salvan went out. The gods allowed her to get into the chariot first. Then they got in. The chariot moved. Mansinha made up his mind. He ran toward the chariot and no sooner had the celestial chariot taken off than he held on to it from below.





The chariot zoomed through the sky. The city of Joshingpur was left behind. The chariot reached over the dark forests, the forests too were left behind and the chariot glided over the orchards of fruits and flowers. There were orchards of figs, oranges, guavas, pears, pineapples, papayas and jackfruits. There were gardens full of lotuses, shoe flowers and jasmines.

The chariot reached Dwarka. There was an orchard of bananas in the city. Mansinha's legs were stuck in a banana tree, he lost grip over the chariot and fell. The chariot moved away.

A *mridangi* stayed in the orchard. He often used to go to the assembly of gods to play his *mridang*, but the gods never paid him for his performance. He was unhappy with the gods for such humiliating treatment. He had therefore stopped going to perform at the assembly of gods. Sitting beneath a banana tree, he was tearing off the thick skin of his palms. He was squeezing the blisters of his fingers, 'Oh my god, my palms have got blisters all over, yet the gods haven't paid me anything, I will never go there again.'

Suddenly, there was a banging sound somewhere. The *mridangi* thought that a cluster of bananas must have dropped. He looked around and found a handsome youth in the orchard. An idea flashed in his mind.

'Who are you, young man?'

Before Mansinha could answer, the *mridangi* held Mansinha's hand and said to him, 'Listen to me young man, whoever you are, I declare you to be a *mridangi*. I will send you to Dev Dwarka. You have to perform there today.'

Mansinha said, 'But my friend, I have never played a *mridang*, I have never even touched it. How will I perform?'

'My blessings are with you and you will do magic. You must beat the *mridang* once and fifty-two beats will resound in the air. Your one touch will produce fifty-two notes.'

Mansinha wore the dress of a *mridangi*—a knife in the necklace, bangles around his wrists, a wide skirt, *kajal* in the eyes and a turban





on the head.

Mansinha was transformed into a mridangi. If he had looked in the mirror, he would have found the reflection to be of someone else!

The chariot landed at Dwarka. Salvan sent for the mridangi. He was not available. 'Why so?' she asked.

'He was not paid his due, so he is angry with the gods. So he will never turn up again,' she received the answer.

Salvan said, 'Okay, I will go and bring him here.'

She went to the orchard with an apsara. The mridangi said, 'I can't come today. Here is a new mridangi, he will play the instrument.' Mansinha recognised Salvan but Salvan could not figure out that the new mridangi was her husband. How could she imagine Mansinha to be there?

The assembly was filled with gods. Salvan was going to dance after eight long months. Everyone was excited about her performance.

Mansinha slapped the mridang once and it gave fifty-two reverberating sounds. The gods were astonished to hear the amazing crescendo. Salvan danced, Mansinha played the mridang. Salvan danced happily to his tune.

Salvan danced, the apsaras danced, the gods too began to dance. All those who were standing and all those who were sitting—everyone started dancing. Salvan was dancing after eight long months. She lost her senses in the rapture of the dance. The lace of her blouse got untied, her blouse dropped and her skirt slipped off. Salvan was naked. She was as naked as when she was born.

Indradev, Sendradev, Saydev, Mahadev, Narandev, Pavandev, Vijdidev, all the gods were shocked, 'Oh! The Queen is naked. Something has to be done, if the word goes around, this will harm the reputation of Dev Dwarka.'

'Stop playing the mridang.' But the mridangi was too engrossed to listen to anyone.





‘Dear Queen, please slow down and stop dancing.’ But Salvan did not pay any heed to the instructions.

Pavandev, the god of wind, took the reins in his hands. The wind blew and picked up the blouse and the skirt that immediately were wrapped around Salvan. The mridangi halted his wild music and Salvan stopped dancing.

Salvan’s feet were blistered. A sweet pain tinged her feet. Salvan stared at the mridangi, ‘Oh mridangi, where were you all these days?’ She took off all her ornaments, asked for a pitambar, put all the expensive jewellery in it and gave it to the mridangi.

‘Mridangi, this is a modest gift I offer at your feet. I also offer myself to you. Call me whenever you need me. I am fascinated by you and your art.’

‘Queen Salvan, do not become so sentimental. Do not lose control over your heart. This is not merely a matter of dancing, but a matter of life. Don’t get carried away by emotions, use your head to take a decision. And once you take a decision, do not go back on your words.’

‘No, mridangi, I am firm on my decision. My decision is borne out of understanding and reason.’

Eba and Jheba were ready with the chariot. The third phase of the night was coming to an end. ‘Be quick, hurry up,’ Salvan said.

The chariot took off. Mansinha clung to it. They reached Joshingpur. Mansinha jumped down before the chariot landed, hid the bundle of ornaments and immediately went to sleep.

Salvan stepped down. The chariot returned to Dwarka. Salvan entered the house. She glanced at the sleeping King and went inside. Later, she dreamt in her sleep that Mansinha was playing a mridang and she was dancing. Her feet had got blistered. When she awoke in the morning, she found blisters on her feet. They were painful. She thought, ‘The dreams of dawn are always true. Is this really possible?’







The cock sang its song of dawn. The bright rays of the sun caressed the earth. The eight continents of Kashi and all the nine continents of the earth were illuminated. It was morning.

Salvan got up. She took up a broom and started sweeping each and every corner of the palace. She came to the doorstep where the king was asleep.

‘Wake up, King Mansinha, hurry up,’ she said.

‘What if I don’t get up?’ Mansinha was in a jovial mood.

‘Stop it, King Mansinha, don’t be funny. Otherwise I will...’

‘What will you do otherwise?’

‘I will put you in a basket and throw it away.’

‘Do you have a basket large enough for me?’

‘I will poke a nail in your butt.’

‘I’m no bull, my darling!’

For the first time in their conjugal life, Mansinha held Salvan’s hand and pulled her to him. Salvan too was in a happy mood and let herself drop in his arms with ease, like a delicate flower.

‘Salvan, I had a dream last night and in my dream I was a mridangi, you were a dancer and after a passionate dance you had blisters on your feet.’

Salvan was startled to hear this, ‘How is this possible? I had the same dream.’ Mansinha stroked her feet, ‘Dear, are the blisters giving you pain?’ Tears filled Salvan’s eyes.

‘Mansinha, King Mansinha, what if the dream comes true?’

‘I would dance, you would play the mridang for days together. I would never turn to Dwarka for the sake of dancing. We would have a peaceful family, a happy life. We have all the material pleasures. To this, the joy of living would be added.’

‘Listen Salvan, forget all else. The dream is a reality. It is really the same, the way it was at night, in Dwarka—the dance, the ornaments, and our dreams.’

Mansinha got the pack of ornaments and showed it to Salvan.





Salvan felt elated. She started dancing. ‘Mansinha, I will never ever go to Dwarka. If I see Dwarka again, it will be only after death, it will be my soul at the door of Dwarka, not me,’ she cooed.

Days passed, nights passed, months passed by. Mansinha played the mridang and Salvan danced. The princess cooked delicious food and they eat ate and drank together in great delight. All over the world, people admired the wonderful pair, Mansinha and Salvan.



Dwarka lost its luster again—the apsaras danced but the charm of Salvan was absent; the mridangi played music but the ecstatic melody of Mansinha was missing. The matter was discussed in Dwarka.

‘God, my god, Dwarka looks like a wasteland without Salvan. Please do something, think of a remedy. Practise black magic, an evil charm or a spell, but bring Salvan back at any cost.’

God said, ‘Salvan is a loyal wife. She has promised Mansinha that she will never see Dwarka again. Now we can expect her soul to be here, her resolution is solid. We are helpless.’

‘Will there never be a dance again by Salvan in Dwarka? Will Salvan never come here? Okay, if not in flesh and blood, bring her soul to Dwarka, we will bestow her a new body.’

God sent for Yama and Jama, ‘Both of you should go to the Shahu ocean, catch a big crocodile and tear off its hide. Go to a blacksmith and ask him to make a large cage. From there, rush to Joshingpur, suck off the soul of Salvan, create a parrot of her soul, place the parrot in the cage and cover the cage with the hide of the crocodile. Hurry up!’

Salvan was dancing, Mansinha was playing the mridang. Suddenly, tears filled Salvan’s eyes. Her heart was palpitating, ‘What is it? What is happening? God, I have never stolen anything in my life, I have never betrayed you, never have I been jealous of anyone in my life, nor have I talked foul of anyone, I don’t remember giving in to sin...why then have I to go through this torture? Why do I feel





uneasy? Why do I feel pressure on my heart? Why are my legs turning numb? Why are my eyes turning blind...oh gods, let me live happily.'

Mansinha said, 'Queen Salvan, overcome these thoughts and doubts. Do not remember the past, do not worry about the future, what is important is the present.'

The Queen started dancing but her limbs failed, her body lost its rhythm.

'Mansinha, Prince Mansinha, you will never come across a woman like me. I could not shower affection on you for a long time and it seems our love life has now come to an end. The gods will not let me live long. Tears fill my eyes. At this youthful age, on a sunny afternoon, I am becoming blind. My heart is pounding heavily, my legs are turning numb, the earth is reeling around me. These are not good signs. Mansinha, look at me for the last time, as the pain of body and fear of death may distort my face, you will not like to look at my distorted face, therefore, take a last look at me.'

Mansinha said, 'My dear Queen, take rest. You seem to be out of your mind right now. Don't trouble yourself so.'

In the meanwhile Eba and Jheba arrived. Yama and Jama also arrived. Salvan was reclining quietly, she had leaned back on a pillar, she was gazing at Mansinha. Yama and Jama took away her soul. They turned it into a parrot and put it into the large cage they had carried along. Then, they covered the cage with a crocodile hide and went to Dwarka.

Mansinha was tired. He was hungry. He looked at Salvan. She was gazing at him, not even blinking.

'Salvan, come, let's eat.'

Salvan did not answer.

Mansinha touched her hand. It was cold! A row of ants was passing over her body. He pulled her hand. Salvan's dead body tumbled down.

Chaos...absolute chaos!





Mansinha was weeping violently, how heart-rending was the agony of the young king!

‘Oh, my queen, where are you? My queen!’

‘My dear queen, where are you hidden, tell me!’

‘God, oh god of Dwarka, why should you choose me as your victim?’

‘God, oh god of Dwarka, why have you punished me so?’

‘God, oh god, why am I left alone in this world?’

‘God, oh god, now I have no shelter left to live in peace.’

‘God, oh god, what will I do now?’

‘God, how will I live without Salvan?’

Everyone in the city of Joshingpur was weeping—Mansinha, Queen Joshingavati, King Joshinga, the beasts, the birds, the breeze, the trees and the water—all wept their heart out. People gathered for the rituals and Salvan was cremated.

Days passed. The passage of time sharpened the pangs of pain. Mansinha remained aloof, morose and brooding. He neither ate nor drank. An inscrutable silence surrounded him.

The soul of Salvan was imprisoned in a cage, in the body of a parrot. The parrot fluttered restlessly in the cage.

All the gods gathered. They made the sculpture of a beautiful, divine apsara. They sprinkled amrut on it and put Salvan’s soul into it. In a moment, the statue came to life. Salvan’s soul was now given a new body.

Queen Salvan loitered around in Dwarka, her melodious voice resonating in the city of the gods, she hopped and skipped happily.

In Dwarka, Shukdev was yet unmarried. It was decided that Salvan should be married to him. The preparations for the occasion began.

Mansinha continued to live a secluded life. One day a sage came to him.

‘Mansinha, Prince Mansinha, this world itself is a huge prison.





Each home is a cell. There are about a dozen prisoners in each cell. Each one lives in the cell for the period he is sentenced for. He is set free when his punishment is over. No one remembers one's companions in a prison cell. Similarly, once a companion of our family-prison is gone, we shouldn't waste our life in his or her memory.'

'But guru, what about my affection and attachment to the queen?'

'This is a futile and cumbersome complexity we have created. A king or a beast or a bird, all produce progeny, nurture and look after them, and the little ones fly away when they grow up. What is a father, a mother, a brother or a sister? You bring up someone and the person in turn will bring up another life, thus life comes to full circle. This is the cycle of worldly life, this is the truth of the illusive world within which we pursue our selfish goals. Even then, as you crave to see Salvan, you will be able to visit Dwarka during your worldly life and that too in your ephemeral body. My blessings are with you.'

Mansinha opened a large box. He took out a big turban, pinned colourful feathers into the turban, put on armlets, tied a chain around his waist and set out on the way to Dwarka. When he reached the divine city, an excited commotion indicated that a wedding was going on. This was the wedding of Shukdev and Salvan. Mansinha asked for Salvan's home.

Salvan was in a new body. Mansinha could not recognise her. But Salvan recognised Mansinha.

It was lunch time. Salvan led Mansinha inside and served him lunch. Mansinha started eating and Salvan fanned him gently. In the meanwhile, the sickening Shukdev tottered in.

Shukdev said, 'I too wish to eat.'

Salvan served him food but put a handful of salt into it. Shukdev couldn't eat a single morsel. He felt suspicious of a foul play. He recognised Mansinha. Immediately, he seized Mansinha and sent Salvan out of Dwarka.

Mansinha said, 'Come, let's bring the tale to an end today.'





Sharpen your swords. I am ready with my furious fists, I do not need anything more to fight you. You have cheated me and stolen my woman. I am going to take her away, come what may!’

The gods were scared to hear this. They closed the gates of Dwarka. Mansinha plucked off a hair from his head and hung the earth with the hair, ‘Give back my Salvan, tell me her whereabouts. If you don’t, Dwarka will be destroyed.’

The gods said, ‘Salvan isn’t here, she is in Dev Dwarka.’

Mansinha went to Dev Dwarka. Indra said, ‘She isn’t here. Possibly, she is in the Dwarka of Sendra.’ Mansinha went there. Sendradev was quick to reply, ‘Not here, go to Ishakdev.’ Ishakdev guided him to Mishakdev. Mishakdev showed him the way to King Padmi’s palace.

The city of Padmi, King Padmi, Queen Padmavati. King Padmi too sent him away. Mansinha explored Dudhiyagadh, Tuppagadh, Kaliyagadh, Pasegadh, Tarigadh and at last went to Agnigadh.

Agnigadh was ruled by King Agni. He lived in a huge palace. The palace had nine hundred rooms. King Agni answered, ‘I don’t know where Salvan is. If she is in any of my nine hundred rooms, take her away.’

Each room was blazing with fire. Mansinha checked all the rooms. Salvan was nowhere.

‘Now? Where should I turn now?’ He saw Mahadev’s place on the way.

‘Mahadev! God of the gods! The gods have played a dirty trick on me. They have taken away Salvan by deception. They have hidden her somewhere. Help me in seeking my queen. I am sure you know about her whereabouts. Where is she? Show me a way to reach that place.’

Mahadev said, ‘Mansinha, I am very happy with your perseverance. Your devotion to your wife is remarkable. I bless you with a charm to enjoy eternal life.’

‘I don’t want eternal life. I want Salvan.’





‘Mansinha, I will bless you with a power to transform your body. You will be able to take any form that you desire—a tree or a beast. Forget Salvan.’

‘I don’t desire such means. I want Salvan.’

‘Mansinha, I can provide you with the power to resist fire, water or a deadly weapon. You will be invincible. Death will stay away from you forever. Forget Salvan.’

‘Mahadev, if you offer me the empire of the world on one side and Salvan on the other, I will choose Salvan. She will be my only choice. I have suffered immensely to reach here. Now I am at your feet. Please don’t kick me out...’

‘Mansinha, I am very happy with you. I bless you with all the charms I offered you. Moreover, I guide you to Elakasta and Belakasta castles. These castles are in the middle of seven oceans. There is neither a gate nor a ladder to enter the castles. A cage hangs in the castles, and in that cage you will find a parrot. The soul of Salvan is inside the parrot. Cross the seven seas, enter the castles, break the cage and take the parrot out, and you will get your Salvan. You will receive her in her own beautiful body. I wish you good luck. Go now!’

Mansinha went to the seashore. He turned himself into a turtle and crossed the seven oceans. He then went to the Elakasta and Belakasta castles, and crept inside in the shape of a large lizard. He then broke the cage and took out the parrot. And right before his eyes, the parrot transformed into Queen Salvan. Mansinha embraced his wife.

Suddenly a voice reverberated through the space, ‘King Mansinha! Queen Salvan! So long as the breeze blows, the water flows, the earth bears humankind, the sun shines and the moon smiles, you too will live. You will be invisible but your love is now a legend. You will live in the tales of humanity. You have become immortal.’





## Tale of Kansari

First, I bow to goddess Saraswati. Then I bow to Mahadev and Parvati. Third to be bowed to are Goddess Amba and Goddess Saptashringi. Fourth I bow to Kansari, Mavli and Goddess Himai.

I pay my homage to Goddesses Nilaya, Kal Sevar, Dudha Sevar, Tumba Sevar, Karuja, Tuhimavli and Phulan Sevar.

I pray to King Vadhu, Sela Mogara, Phulan Mogara, Chhaya Mogara, Vala Pangan, Raya Pantha, Ilamdev and Salu Pandav.

Darkness, destruction, Jadi Ikar, the new-born earth, the cold earth, the earth dislocated from its axis, the earth of the gods, the pure earth, Goddess Bhavani, who rules the abysmal nether of the earth, the world of the dead, all the three worlds, the third layer of the earth, the vacuum in the seventh layer of the earth, the mountain Meru, the eight continents of Kashi, all the nine continents of the earth and all the ten continents of the universe. Dev Dwarka, the court of Indra, Indra Dev, Sendra Dev, Aavalidev, Bavalidev, Meshadev, Keshadev, Andardev, Pandardev, God Kartari, Upajadev, Nipajdev, Alavatidev, Malavatidev, Sartaridev, and at last, God of Amrut, I bow to all.

I pay my tribute to the Mavli of the sacred places of Suryagadh, Burayagadh, Gadthagabari, Shukla Tirtha, Surita Gadha, Belakapar, Upajagadh, Nipajagadh, Bhupera, Satpuda, Devamala, Mangyagadh, Tungyagadh, Nakyagadh, Salleragadh, Mulleragadh, Tamboleghadh, Dighai, Dhamane, Sendora Bhavani, Sendavad Durunga, Alavate,







Palaghate, Dudhagadh, Phulagadh, Galavana, Gavalagadh, Raya Kakada, Dhula Kakada, Sena Kakada, Pandavagadh, Chinchkunda, Bhonvare, Navavane, Tulashigadh, Bhamanyagadh, Mountain Nadage, Kansaragadh, Gadagadh and Temberegadh.

We implore you to accept our tribute, to lend your ear to our prayers, and to make us happy and prosperous. We solicit your presence and welcome you to listen to the tale of Kansari.

Sin was rampant during those days. The world had forgotten the ideals of morality. Those were the days when immorality and vicious practices were at their peak. Truth and righteousness were forgotten and mistrusted by all.

God was no longer considered the omniscient and omnipotent force. Science was the only religion. Man felt he could control the natural elements. Philosophy and religion were turned into commerce. Evil ruled the world unchallenged. Material greed was the order of the day.

Death devoured the wise and the good. An impotent generation, without any vitality of truth, occupied the earth. Such people were abundant in number and bred the same kind in great numbers.

The bond of humanity was an anachronism. Restrain on carnal desire was lost. Not noble character, but superficial intelligence had a stronghold on society.

God was engrossed in deep thought, 'How could one bring a solution to this anarchy?' Days passed, nights passed, but he could not imagine a solution to the entanglement. Things were taking a serious turn every day. The situation was bleak.

The attitude of the people was at its worst. There seemed no chance for improvement. Every home was suffering from chaotic conflicts. No one trusted another, and still worse, none had faith in one's own self. The king had lost his purpose, his subjects too had forgotten their duty. Gluttony could lead a son to murder his father. Such was the state of society.

Now? What now? What would happen now?





God called for Mahadev. Brahma too was invited. They had a discussion on the matter. They started thinking about the situation. The decision they arrived at was a painful one. But there was no other way out.

The gods decided to destroy the earth. A new earth was to be created.

Creation is a long and tedious process.

A seed requires soil, water, a conducive climate, and then a shoot grows out. A tiny plant sways in the breeze. It grows gradually. Flowers bloom, juicy fruits hang on it and the fruits carry seeds within them. If a germ enters it, it destroys everything. The creation of life is a long and precarious process.

And destruction? It is very easy and quick. In the blink of the eyes, everything can be destroyed. The earth had to be destroyed. But how?

After a long debate, a devastating deluge was chosen as the weapon of destruction. All life was to meet its end in a massive flood of water.

Before unleashing this ultimate force, all varieties of seeds were to be collected at one place. From among the innocent communities on earth, a boy and a girl were to be selected for survival. It was decided to place them inside a huge gourd. This huge gourd would float over the waters. Everything inside the gourd would thus survive.

This huge gourd belonged to a rare species. Its creeper would have a bud after twelve years and its flowers would bloom in the sixteenth year. A couple of more years for a fruit to come and then the fruit would take twelve more years to be ripe. This fruit of the gourd would be gigantic, as huge as a house.

Bhavani herself planted the seed of the gourd. The basin was kept close to a heap of garbage, right outside Mahadev's home. A shoot sprouted on the sixteenth day. The creeper grew in the warm sun. A year passed, twelve years passed, and a flower bloomed in the sixteenth year. A golden flower on a silver branch. On that flower





sat a tiny gourd. Mahadev himself guarded the fruit to protect it from mischievous mice.

Days passed, nights passed, weeks and fortnights passed, many, many months passed by. At the end of twelve years, the gourd grew to be as big as a house.

People were amazed by this miracle, 'What a big gourd!' They had neither seen nor heard of such a huge gourd. Crowds gathered to see this unique gourd.

Mahadev invited a carpenter. There was no other carpenter as skillful as him in the entire world.

The carpenter came with his tools—nails, a saw and hammer.

'I am here, my god, at your service.'

'Look at this huge gourd. Make it hollow from within. Make some arrangements in it—build a granary and a large room to stay. And do not forget to make a vessel to store drinking water. You may begin work now. You are not to take rest even for a moment. Work day and night. Don't waste time.'

The master carpenter started working. He carved the gourd from within. Mahadev sent all the gods to collect the seeds of all vegetation on earth. For the human population of the new earth, Mahadev himself went in search of human seeds.

Mahadev checked out Baniyas, Brahmans, Desais and Deshmukhs. He inspected Patels, Patavas, kings, the poor and the wealthy. But he felt disappointed to see these communities. None had true spirit and vigour. Each community had betrayed its creed and character. Brahmans ruthlessly killed innocent animals and ate them. The lower castes had started to preach religion, pretending to be saints. Religion was a business and the saints had begun to conspire like callous professionals.

Leaving the cities and the villages, Mahadev went into the forest. He wandered in the forest but the inhabitants of the forests too were not living an honest life.





In the distant land there was a forest of bamboo trees. It was full of gigantic bamboo stems. Mahadev went into it. The Mahar community dwelt in the forest. They used to weave cane baskets.

There lived a very poor family in the community. While weaving baskets, the family members sang prayers of devotion. They were happy if they earned enough for a modest meal. If in case even this was not available, they slept peacefully after their daily prayer to the almighty. Mahadev picked a boy and a girl from this family. He covered their eyes with a cloth and locked them in a dark room.

Meanwhile, the master craftsman, the great carpenter, completed his work. He bowed to Mahadev, 'Mahadev, my work is over, what is your next command?' Mahadev saw his work. He gave beautiful gifts to the carpenter and let him go.

Mahadev filled the big gourd with large amounts of food and water, enough to last for twelve years. He also kept numerous kinds of seeds in the gourd.

The Mahar children were in deep sleep. They too were placed inside the gourd.

Doom was imminent on the world.

The festival of Holi was approaching. Holi was an occasion of great excitement and celebration. On the day of the festival, people were dancing all around. Sumptuous food was being served everywhere. Toddy and other intoxicating drinks had influenced the minds of the people. All restraint was thrown to the winds.

Gods Vishnu and Mahadev decided to unleash the torrential waters on the day of Holi. Dhegudev, Megudev, Varadev, the god of thunder and Khappar Jogani too were consulted in a confidential meeting. Parvati welcomed the gods with arati. Mahadev gave necessary instructions to the gods. They were all informed about the impending doom on the day of Holi.

A wild revelry was at its peak on earth. Suddenly, the atmosphere changed. The god of wind changed the mood on earth. The mild breeze turned into a strong wind. The whirlwind built pillars of





dust, sweeping away the rooftops of houses. Huge trees were knocked down. Beasts and birds scurried around in restless haste. People became scared and began to put their belongings inside their houses and locked their doors. They sensed a sinister menace lurking on the world. The wind carried dark clouds along with it. There was darkness at noon. Panic swept the people on earth and weeping cries of pain were heard from all directions. Howling thunder terrorised the creatures of the world. The earth looked frightening in the fierce shafts of lightning. Dark clouds descended and moved ominously over the earthen dwellings. The sky cracked. There was a tremendous cloud burst. It began raining in sheets. People realised the potent danger. Disease and debauchery were forgotten. The influence of intoxicating syrups receded in a moment. Only the fear of death pervaded. People were shaken by fear of the end of the world.

Water began to fill the world. Farms and gardens, rivers and lakes, valleys and roads—everywhere water began to spread with violent force. Men, beasts, birds, trees, everything started drowning in the wild waters.

This was a battle for survival. Leaving everything behind, people ran desperately to find a safe place. The voracious vessel of Jogani consumed everything offered to it. The human species was quickly reduced to naught. The rain didn't show any sign of halting. The water levels rose to unprecedented heights. Even tall houses were submerged in water. By evening, the water level had risen to the height of seven palm trees piled one upon the other. The earth was lost in water. All men, birds and beasts drowned in the water. Only the huge gourd floated calmly. Thus, the deadly holocaust brought the end of the earth. Earth was immersed in the great deluge.



The earth was flooded. From tiny insects to gigantic beasts, all were dead. Their bodies rotted in the waters.





One after the other, seven days passed by. Weeks turned into months. Twelve months passed by and a year ended. Thus nine years and nine days passed by.

Mahadev felt convinced that the earth had become lifeless.

He decided to proceed with the creation of a new earth. He called the assembly of gods.

Mahadev ordered Sundev to tightly hold the big gourd, Sundev.

The responsibility of earth's creation was given to Kartukidev. Kartukidev took a few blank papers and a pen. He wrote letters to all the gods saying, 'You may be hungry or thirsty, you may be eating or drinking; whether you are asleep or wide awake, wherever you are, whatever you are doing, come immediately to the assembly.'

All the gods hastened to the assembly. The court looked magnificent in the presence of all the gods. They were exhilarated at the thought of the new earth. The first requirement to create earth was soil. Whatever soil was available was deep under water. Who would go down there?

The turtle said, 'I will go. I will carry the soil on my back. Then someone will have to unload it from my back.' The mammoth turtle's back was as large as a huge ground. A fly came forward and said, 'God, I will unload the soil from the turtle's back and give shape to the new earth.'

The turtle dived into the unfathomable depths of the water. When he surfaced back, he carried a mountain of mud on its back. The fly took the soil and started shaping the lump.

Once, twice, thrice...thus the turtle measured the depth of the water six times. The fly prepared the earth from the soil brought by the turtle.

It was now time for the seventh dive. Sin crept into the fly's mind. She thought of stealing a little soil to make her own home. She swallowed a small lump of soil. A very small quantity of soil remained for the earth. The globe was complete but there were many





pits in it. The last lot of soil was enough to fill the pits. The turtle had brought equal amounts of soil every time. The onus was pointed at the fly.

She lied, 'God, I have not stolen the soil.' She repeated the same song before Vishnu. Vishnu took a pair of pincers and squeezed the fly's belly. Her belly broke into two. She started to weep, 'Oh god, my lord, you are my creator, I am your creature. With the help of your blessings alone can I sustain myself. What have you done to me? I committed a trivial mistake, I swallowed some soil. I confess my sin, but how can you punish me so severely for it? I wanted to make my little niche. You have cut my body into two, how will I bear children now? Instead of appreciating the work I did for you, you have punished me.'

The gods discussed the incident. They agreed with the fly that the punishment was unduly severe. They said to her, 'Look now, you won't conceive children in your womb, but when you build your home, you will lay an egg there. A caterpillar will be born from it. That caterpillar in turn will become a fly. Thus you will have your offsprings.'

The earth was ready, but it had many pits and ditches. When water filled the ditches, only a quarter of the land remained. As no change was possible now, the earth was accepted as it was.

The next task was to make the surface of the earth flat. This was left to Juganand and Bhimabali. They picked up pounding stones and began their work. Yet certain portions of the land remained uneven and could not be leveled. These became the highlands and the mountains of the earth.

In the end Bhimabali and Juganand assessed the land. There were five portions of land and nine of the ocean.

Various shrines were built for the gods at their respective places: for Dungandev, on the mountains; for Seemdev, Nagdev, Vaghdev, on the outskirts; for Dhamandev, in the abyss of the earth; for Suryadev, at Chandradev; for Taradev, in the sky; and for Gamdev





and Ganvarimata, in the village.

Parvati took the huge gourd from Sundev. The gourd was placed on a mountain where she kicked it forcefully. The gourd was smashed. Its seeds were planted all around. The Mahar children who were in a stupor were brought back to consciousness. The gods made them forget their past. The children began to frolic around.

The place where the gourd was broken is believed to be the Pimparula mountain in Dharampur *taluka*. Sand and shells are found there even today. Some elders believe the place to be in Jhenjhurima. A temple for the gourd was built on the Pimparula mountain.

Bhimabali and Juganand were passing by the ocean. The ocean was very stormy and would invade the land every now and then. Bhimabali marked its limit. The limit was called Bhimpal. The ocean asked, 'Where should I release my energy?' Bhimabali bestowed him *Aar* and *Veer*. He said, 'Twice in a day you may come inward and then recede again. Then you will not have any energy left to cause tempests. Even if you are stormy, do not cross Bhimpal. You may go now.'

Parvati sowed the seeds on the new earth. Dense forests grew from them. Abundant vegetation grew on the earth. Gradually, insects, birds and beasts began to fill the new space.



After men got the right to till the land, the earth turned green with the fields full of rich crops. But no one managed life on earth. The mighty made the most out of this anarchy. It was a society riven with conflicts.

A few wise men came forward. After a long discussion they appointed one amongst them as their leader. An organized society was formed. An oral constitution of the society was agreed upon. The leader was named as the king of the earth. The responsibilities of the king and the rights and duties of the subjects were decided.







The king was to work for the welfare of society. The subjects were to make a strong community.

The first king had a daughter. Her name was Rajmata. She was beautiful and cultured. Her face was as bright as the full moon and her voice was sweet and ringing. Wherever she went, people kept gazing at her lovely face.

When she was twelve years old, Rajmata had her first menstrual period. She became conscious of her femininity. Along with sweet sensual feelings, new horizons began to emerge in Rajmata's life. Rajmata had a friend. Her name was Sanyadevadi. Sanyadevadi and Rajmata were close friends and spent all their time together. Sanyadevadi also belonged to a royal family.

Once, Rajmata went to the village pond to fetch water. She went into the calm waters of the pond and looked at her reflection in the water. She was amazed by her beautiful face. She kept gazing at her reflection for a long time. At that moment another gorgeous reflection shimmered beside that of Rajmata. Rajmata gazed at the image. It was of a royal or perhaps, a divine man. Rajmata could not believe her eyes. She turned around but there wasn't anyone there. She looked around, not a soul was there. She ran around breathlessly but could not find the man whose reflection had disturbed her so. The same incident occurred the next day. The reflection appeared in the water but the man remained unseen. This was a wonderful miracle. An uncanny sensation gripped Rajmata. This was certainly not an illusion. This happened every day. There was someone around. Who was he? Was it a ghost? A demon? A magical charm? An evil spell? What was it?

Sanyadevadi had been out of the town. When she returned, Rajmata gave her an account of this fantastic experience.

Sanyadevadi said, 'Believe it or not, some heavenly god has fallen in love with you.'

'I have seen his reflection. I like him. But who is he? Where does he stay? What does he do? I do not know anything about him.'





Rajmata and Sanyadevadi went to a garden. While they were chatting in the garden, they sensed someone's presence behind them. Someone was listening to their talk. Rajmata turned back. She caught the glimpse of a man vanishing swiftly into the bushes. She ran behind him and rummaged through the bushes. No one was there. Rajmata checked the leaves and flowers. She found a beautiful, tiny caterpillar slithering on a leaf. She asked the caterpillar, 'Who are you? What are you doing here? Why are you following me? Whoever you are, a ghost or an evil spirit, appear before me as you really are.'

Sanyadevadi added, 'Appear in your true form immediately.'

The caterpillar disappeared. A divine man surfaced through the air. He was a handsome youth with a smiling face, wearing a pitambar, an armlet, a golden chain around his waist, and a garland of colourful flowers around his neck.

Sanyadevadi enquired, 'Who are you? Why do you chase Rajmata?'

He replied, 'I am Kartukidev. I love Rajmata. I follow her wherever she goes. I keep changing my form to be around her.'

'But Kartukidev, you are a god. Rajmata is a human being. You ought not to follow her like this; it doesn't befit a celestial divinity as you.'

'I love her. I wish to marry her and spend my life in her company.'

Rajmata's heart was beating violently, as if it would burst any minute. She blushed all over and started to scratch the earth with her toe, not having the strength to look up and face her lover. Sanyadevadi handled the affair well.

'My lord, the customs of society bind everyone. Rajmata will marry you, you will get her, but first, you will have to take her parents in confidence. You can meet Rajmata only after you obtain their consent.'

Rajmata and Sanyadevadi returned home. Kartukidev persuaded the matter in the customary fashion and eventually





Kartukidev and Rajmata were married. After their marriage, Rajmata went to live in the kingdom of Kartukidev.

Sanyadevadi got married in the city of Sengaldipi. Days passed, nights passed, months were over after this occasion. Rajmata was pregnant with a child. Days passed—one, two, three, four days, and thus a month got over. A month passed, two months went by, three months got over and one after the other, nine months and nine days were over. Rajmata gave birth to a beautiful daughter. These were the days of monsoon. Fresh shoots had sprouted from the earth. The earth looked beautiful, enveloped in tender green. As the girl was born at the time of the beginning of new life, she was named Kansari. All over the earth, farmers reaped rich harvests that year. People were happy, celebrating their prosperity. Kansari grew up. She once asked for toys to play with. Rajmata went to the well-known master carpenter and bought a stamper of grain. From a sweeper she bought a basket to thresh the grains. Kansari was happy to see her toys. The three year old little Kansari would pound small little stones with the stamper and thresh stones in the threshing basket. This simple game kept her busy the entire day. One day she pounded some stones, threshed them and then went to Rajmata saying, 'Mother, please cook this rice.'

Rajmata said to her, cajoling, 'My dear, these are stones. We can't cook them.'

But Kansari was obstinate. An adamant child never gives up even a silly idea. Besides, Kansari was a girl. To add to it, she was a princess. Rajmata had to surrender. Rajmata put the vessels on the stove and started crying. She was crying at her daughter's silliness but suddenly a miracle occurred. The stones turned into rice grains. The water turned into milk.

Rajmata bowed to Kansari, 'Oh my daughter, how did you learn this skill?'

The news of Kansari's miracle spread everywhere. The assembly of gods had gathered in Dwarka. There too, this unusual miracle





became the subject of conversation. The divine powers were unanimously critical about such unusual ability in a human child. They decided to abduct Kansari and bring her to Dwarka. They offered a special reward for the abductor of Kansari. Narandev and Mahadev accepted the challenge. They descended on the earth to take Kansari away. Sanyadevadi in Sengaldipi learnt about their conspiracy and immediately informed Rajmata about it. Rajmata became cautious and kept Kansari in hiding. Many days passed by, the plan of the gods was forgotten, and Kansari once again started to move around freely.

Mahadev and Narandev came to Rajmata's place and asked for fire to light a *bidi*. Rajmata went inside to bring a piece of firewood. Kansari was playing outside. As soon as Rajmata went inside, Narandev and Mahadev took Kansari away. They hid her in Dwarka.

The world was swept by dismay. Sanyadevadi came down from Sengaldipi and brought Himaidevkothari, her daughter, along with her.

'Sister, though I had warned you in advance, you did not take sufficient care of Kansari.'

Rajmata grumbled, 'One cannot change what is destined to happen. I am worried about Kansari. Where could she be? What would she be doing? I am worried if she would have got anything to eat.'

Sanyadevadi stayed at Rajmata's place for a few days. When she was leaving, Rajmata insisted that Himaidevi should stay back. Rajmata liked to be with Himaidevi. After a period of eight years they found that Kansari was in Dwarka. She had become a young woman.



Since the day Kansari was lost, Himaidevi had stayed with Rajmata. When Kansari returned, she became a bosom friend of





Himaidevi. Kansari and Himaidevi got along very well. Their friendship was compared to that of Rajmata and Sanyadevadi.

Kansari liked to walk through forests and orchards. She loved to work in the fields. Both the friends lingered on for hours in the fields and forests. One day they strolled toward the mountain of Pilvarendhar. The monsoon had made the sylvan hill greener. Clean and pure water fell down the hills in small trickles. The young women were chatting cheerfully. A light breeze was blowing. A sweet tune was riding over the breeze, filling the pleasant atmosphere with pleasant notes. This sweet music came from a *tambemahovar*.

Kansari and Himaidevi followed the melodious tune. After walking for a while, they came upon a shepherd boy playing music. A river was flowing by and on an island-like piece of land, stood a tree. The boy was sitting on one of its branches.

Kansari was overwhelmed by the swirling music and started dancing. The shepherd boy noticed her and on his *tambemahovar*, began to make new tunes. All the cows stopped grazing and gathered around the tree, completely enthralled by the lovely sounds.

The next day, Kansari and Himaidevi visited the place again. The boy was sitting there, playing the *tambemahovar*. This began to happen every day. The shepherd boy played music and Kansari danced to his enchanting tunes. Kartukidev and Rajmata were planning to arrange Kansari's marriage. Kartukidev wanted Kansari to marry a god. Kartukidev invited all the great kings and gods to Kansari's *swayamvar*. He requested all the gods to attend the event.

Kansari invited the shepherd boy and said, 'Young man, I wish to get married now. My *swayamvar* has been organised. Do come over. Bring your *tambemahovar* with you. If you can't find a place in the pandal, sit outside. I will choose you as my husband.'

The *swayamvar* was a grand occasion. Great conqueror kings had gathered from all over the world. Saints and sages had come. People had crowded the place. Many gods had come to grace the occasion. The kings were sitting below golden parasols. Each king





was allotted a seat befitting his status. The saints and sages sat below umbrellas prepared from tiger hides. Hundreds of maidens stood fanning the kings. The pandal looked beautiful. That shepherd too had come down from Pilvarendhar. The pandal was overflowing with people. So he sat outside. He was wearing a dhoti and a big turban. He had brought his dear tambemahovar with him. The kings moved around with great pomp. The great conqueror kings had a stately dignity. The gods were majestic in their style. Each was scornful of the others. Every god thought himself to be the suitable match for Kansari. Their sycophant servants gleefully agreed with them.

The shepherd was completely indifferent to all the activity around. He considered his possibility of becoming a bridegroom as naught. He had come merely to observe the grand ceremony.

Kansari entered the assembly. All eager eyes were upon her. She bowed to the assembly and sang a prayer. Then expressing her gratitude, she bowed to Kartukidev. Kansari was holding a plate in her hand. There were lamps on the plate. One hundred maids were following Kansari. Kansari first went to the kings. All the kings were standing straight, breathless with excitement. After bowing to all the kings, Kansari walked away to the row of the great conqueror kings. From there, she rushed to the gods in a brisk pace. Kartukidev was happy and relieved as he felt sure that Kansari would choose a god as her husband. But Kansari crossed the row of gods and in haste, walked out of the pandal. Everyone was astonished and wondered, 'Has she gone out of her mind?'

Kansari went to the shepherd boy sitting outside the pandal on a garbage heap. Five times she performed his arti, and put the garland of flowers around his neck. The incident shocked everyone who had gathered there. The kings, the great conquerors and all the gods felt annoyed. Kartukidev had to bear their fury. 'Were we invited to suffer such humiliation?' they cried.

Kartukidev himself was not happy with this alliance. Kansari





was a princess. Her marriage to a shepherd was a mismatch. The wedding was over. Hundreds of people enjoyed the sumptuous lunch. Kansari was very happy. After the wedding, the shepherd was given the name of Kansara. Kansari went to stay with the shepherd in his small thatched hut.

The gods were indeed displeased by Kansari's marriage. Years ago, they had kidnapped Kansari so that they could keep her in Dev Dwarka. Their attempts had been unsuccessful. Now they had faced yet another defeat.

Kansari's father, Kartukidev too, was very angry with Kansari. The irate Kartukidev, Narandev and Mahadev planned to do away with Kansari's husband. At her husband's house, Kansari became busy with the daily chores of farming. Kansara would take the herd of cows to the Pilvarendhar hill every day. Kansari ground and crushed the grains and cooked food. They lived happily. But they did not know that Kartukidev, Narandev and Mahadev had planned to kill Kansara.

One day when Kansari was busy with her house work and her husband had gone to Pilvarendhar, Narandev and Mahadev went to the hill. Narandev turned himself into a stump of a broken tree-trunk. Mahadev became a tiger. Kansara, the shepherd, was driving his herd. The next moment when he jumped from a stone to the stump of a trunk, immediately Narandev clutched his feet tightly. Mahadev, disguised as a tiger, attacked him. Kansara could not flee as Narandev's grip was very strong. Kansara was fatally injured.

Meanwhile, Kansari was pounding seeds in the kitchen. Suddenly, her bangles broke. Her bindi fell. Her eyes started flickering. Her heart started beating violently. She sensed the omens of a disaster. She contemplated the situation with eyes closed and visualised the death of her husband. She ran toward Pilvarendhar with the big stamper.

Mahadev could run away as a tiger but Narandev could not transform himself as quickly. Kansari recognized him. She felt deeply





hurt. Kansari looked at her husband, his body was quivering with the little life it still had. She carried him to a nearby cave. In the cave, she built a magical cover around his body so that nothing could hurt him. Air, water, ants, insects and wild animals could not touch Kansara's body. His body remained in the same position. Kansari closed the entrance of the cave with a big block of stone.

Kansari was suffering in bleak despair, 'What kind of gods are these? They are supposed to protect and feed the poor. But these gods blatantly exploit humble people. When I was young, they kidnapped me. Now they are unhappy because I chose a shepherd as my husband. Can I not live my life the way I wish? Now they have slaughtered my husband. They are not gods, they are devils.'

Kansari invoked the gods, 'If I am a true *pativrata*, Pavandev, Agasidev, Dhegudev, Megudev and Jaladevima will do as I wish.' These gods were ready to help Kansari.



Sanyadevadi came down from Sengaldipi. Himaidevi also came along with her. Kansari was sitting all alone in a sombre mood. She was prepared to battle against the gods, 'The mighty and powerful should set an example for the common folk. They should be compassionate and sympathetic to the destitute earthen lot and protect them. But in my case this is a complete contradiction!'

Himaidevi persuaded her, 'Sister, you are all alone and the enemy is a mighty group of gods. How will you fight them?'

'I will do everything possible. This is a cruel injustice and I am bound to put it right single-handedly.'

Kansari invoked Dhegudev, Megudev, Pavandev, Jaladevi and Agasidev. The gods immediately came to her help.

'Jaldevima, suck half the water of the world.'

'Okay.'

Only half of the earlier quantity of water remained on the earth.







‘Agasimata, destroy the seeds, beans and cereals on the earth. Let only some amount remain so that human beings can neither fill their stomachs, nor die of hunger.’

‘Okay.’

Only a little food was left in the world.

‘Pavandev, blow with all your strength.’

Wind struck the earth ceaselessly.

‘Dhegudev and Megudev, you will not shower rain until I tell you to do so.’

‘Okay.’

The sky became bare and cloudless.

People felt terrorised by the swift change. They desperately searched for water. They started starving. They swallowed the leaves of trees and plants. The wind was wild and the scorching sun tortured the inhabitants of the earth. The cloudless sky provided no soothing cover. Even a death-wish was futile. The skeletal bodies wandered around but death was too precious to gain. Living with such suffering was like being in a hellish cauldron.

Kansari untied her hair and went to the seashore of Dwarka. There she built twelve big forts and lay down naked in the centre. These were forts of stone, bronze, gold, silver, brass, copper, turmeric, vermillion and others.

At the centre of the forts lay Kansari. Havoc pervaded the earth. Food and water were scarce, strong winds blew continuously and the heat was terrifying. Even if man desired, death would not bring an end to this agonizing life.

The gods panicked. What was the solution to this disaster? They too were starving.

The birds and beasts had lost their vitality. The fruits and flowers had wilted. Small pots in the kitchen and the big oceans of the world, everything had run dry. The granaries were empty and the stones at the mills didn’t have even a handful of flour. People had become





shameless. Their desire to live had made them blind. Mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, daughter, sons—all human bonds lost their value. Survival was the only motive of one and all.

An assembly of gods was called. Narandev, Mahadev and Kartukidev were fiercely condemned. Narandev was ordered to seek Kansari to end the drought. Narandev went to Sengaldipi. It was the only source for authentic information. Kansari had spared Sanyadevadi from the devastation. There was sufficient food available here. Narandev was in a disheveled state. He looked ill with his unshaven beard. His body had become emaciated. Sanyadevadi failed to recognise him. Narandev had to tell her who he was.

Sanyadevadi felt pity for him. She gave him water to wash but Narandev hurriedly poured the water in his parched throat. Sanyadevadi served him rice to eat. Some grains stuck on his moustache. Narandev bit the stubs of hair and swallowed them with the rice grain. When he went out, hungry crowds pulled at his beard and moustache.

Narandev stayed back but Sanyadevadi or Himaidevi did not give him a chance to ask a single question. Narandev grew more and more anxious with each passing day. People had become uncontrollable. The gods had murdered Kansara to satisfy their ego and now innocent people suffered the miserable drought. Humankind grew hostile toward the gods.

Same was the situation above. Narandev and Mahadev were the targets of assault. Everyone was discussing the issue. Narandev had not returned from Sengaldipi. Mahadev felt that the situation could go out of control if nothing was done immediately. He imprisoned the whole community of gods. He locked them and tied each one with iron chains. A special messenger was dispatched to Sengaldipi with a message for Narandev.

That night Narandev had a dream. In it he saw all the gods in a prison. They were shackled with chains. He woke up with a start.





The messenger reached him the next morning. Narandev gathered courage and enquired the whereabouts of Kansari. Sanyadevadi was well aware of the woeful life of the lay people. 'Narandev, what you did wasn't fair. You are responsible for the devastating drought on earth. Go quickly to Dwarka. Kansari is lying there on the seashore. Take Himaidevi along with you.'

Narandev sent the messenger back with the message that Kansari was at Dwarka and he would bring her back. Narandev and Himaidevi went to Dwarka. Kansari was lying at the centre of twelve forts. The huge gates were opened for Himaidevi but Narandev had to creep through the small wicket gates. Kansari woke up. She could sense the presence of a man and asked, 'Himaidevi, who is the man around?'

Narandev had no face to confront Kansari. He disguised himself as a clown with a big rotund tummy, a wide basketlike head, thin dangling hands and bony legs. In such a garb, Narandev came before Kansari, hopping, jumping and performing all kinds of foolish antics. Kansari started laughing. Narandev began to weep and said, 'Kansari, I am very sorry, please forgive me for my doing. People are starving to death, I am responsible for it, I am the culprit, please forgive me and save the world from drought.'

Kansari's purpose was served. The gods were fiercely condemned by the people. She too felt concerned about the affliction human beings were undergoing caused by the wickedness of gods.

Kansari invoked Dhegudev and Megudev. Agasidev, Pavandev and Bhute Sanvara were also called.

'Go and bring back all the grains taken away from earth, fill the pots in the kitchens with grains and all the oceans with water again. Dhegudev and Megudev should shower water on the earth and saturate the parched earth. Bhute Sanvara should bestow people with vigor and vitality and make them fertile. Off now, quickly.'

The gods bowed to Kansari. Food grains filled the granary, water started to flow, the wind relented and the sky showered rain. Happy





days were back again.

Kansari said, 'Narandev and Himaidevi, you may go now. I will see you after some time.'

Then Kansari became invisible. She reached Sengaldipi and went to Sanyadevadi in the form of a little child. Sanyadevadi offered her a kingdom. Kansari said, 'I don't want a kingdom.'

From there she went to Rajmata. Rajmata was weeping. She was crying since the day Kansari's husband had been cruelly killed. Tears trickled down her eyes. Rajmata could not recognise Kansari.

Kansari said, 'Mother, I am your Kansari.' Rajmata embraced her and took Kansari in her lap. Kansari sat in her mother's lap like a small child.

Kansari then went to god Vishnu. She took some amrut from his amrut *kumbha*. She also took a peacock feather from him. From there Kansari went to the hill of Pilvapendhar, removed the block of granite and entered the cave. She sprinkled the amrut on Kansara. Kansara's body stirred and he came back to life. Next she went to Mahadev. Mahadev was not at home. She went to the prison and released all the gods. They gods hailed Kansari and treated her with great respect. Kansari went to Mahadev's place again. Mahadev had fever and was shivering violently. Kansari manifested herself as a bud in the Mahadev's bathroom. No one had any idea that the bud was Kansari. All the gods came to see Mahadev. Many doctors treated Mahadev but the fever was uncontrollable. Kansari remained there as a bud.

Twelve kinds of Kunkna dwelt on the hill of Pilvapendhar. A soldier went to fetch a Kunkna there. He was not at home. His wife was pounding grains. She asked, 'What has my Kunkna done to you? Why do you want him?'

Just then the Kunkna returned home. The soldier took him to Mahadev's place. The Kunkna immediately recognized Kansari. Kansari revealed her real form to the Kunkna. Mahadev was immediately cured.





Kansari went to Kartukidev. He annihilated Kansari's hands and legs and ordered his soldiers to throw away her body in Dwarka. Kansari stood up. Her hands and legs were restored again. She said, 'The bullock is my vehicle. I don't need your chariot. I will now go to Dwarka.'

On her bullock Kansari advanced toward Dwarka. It was a pitch black night. On such a night Kansari assumed the form of a black cat and went to a goldsmith. The goldsmith had a dream. Kansari said to him, 'Make me a sheet of bronze. Put lac on it and after coating it with silver, prepare an idol of mine.'

From there she went to the Kunkna's home. Kansari said to him, 'Always keep a staff in your hand and work hard. Worship me, I am present in each seed of the harvest. Every food grain represents me, it is just one of my many forms. Never waste it, never throw it away. Feed all those who are hungry. I will make you prosperous.'

Kansari reached Dwarka on her bullock.

Even today, every Kunkna family has an idol of Kansari. The festival of Kansari is celebrated at the harvest of each season.

*In the oral tradition, several versions are found of the same tale. The tale of Kansari too is narrated with diverse story lines. In Chikhali, Vansda and Dharampur, the tale of Kansari is narrated on a ghanghali. In Dang, the tale is narrated on a thali.*

*The 'Tale of Kansari' as popular in Dang, is completely different from the version of the tale popular in Valsad. In Valsad, they call her Kanasra, not Kansari. This as well as other versions of the tale are narrated here.*

One day Mahadev and Parvati had a long debate about Mahadev's greatness. Mahadev claimed himself to be the most powerful god in the world. Parvati strongly resisted, 'No, there are numerous saints, sages and divinities that are far greater than you. You are but a pygmy compared to them.'





Mahadev said, 'If it is so, show me at least one example of such a person.'

Parvati asked him to go to Yehu Mavli, who stayed in the black fort on the island of Jambu. Mahadev rubbed ash on his body and went to Yehu Mavli in the form of a sage. Yehu Mavli recognised Mahadev. She greeted him and was hospitable. She prepared a sumptuous lunch for Mahadev. She added saffron in the rotlas. Mahadev sat on the threshold for having lunch. He ate half of a rotla and left the remaining half, saying that it should be given to a dog. Then Mahadev went away.

Yehu Mavli decided to eat the leftover piece. The moment she ate it, she felt extremely hot as if her body was on fire. Yehu Mavli conceived a child by eating the rotla. Time passed by. After exactly nine months and nine days, Yehu Mavli had labour pain. Yehu Mavli started crying, 'I am all alone in this world. Where will I go now? Who will take care of me? I am helpless.' God sent two celestial maids to serve her. One of them sat at Yehu's feet, and the other took Yehu's head on her lap. Yehu Mavli delivered a daughter. Her daughter was named Kansara. After observing the special rituals on the fifth, sixth and twelfth day after birth, the celestial maids left.

One day, Kansara was playing with stones. She playfully commanded the stones to turn into rice. There was a heap of rice. She ordered the dust to become flour. There was a mound of flour. Yehu Mavli was surprised. How did this little girl know such tricks?

When Kansara was twelve years old, she asked, 'Mother, everyone around has a father, why don't I have a father? Who is my father? I want to see him.'

Yehu Mavli said, 'Go to Dhavalisagar. Mahadev stays there. He is your father. Go and meet him.'

Kansara went to Dhavalisagar. She was angry with Mahadev. He had not fulfilled any of his duties as a father. He had never visited his daughter or inquired about her well-being.

'If Mahadev is a god, let him be the god of Dhavalisagar, he isn't





a god to me,' she thought.

Kansara sprouted as a bud in Mahadev's home. As soon as this happened, Mahadev grew feverish. He started shivering. All the medicines were ineffective in curing Mahadev's fever.

One day a deadly thunder shook the earth. A voice resounded through the vast sky, 'Mahadev will get well only if someone identifies the bud grown in his home.' Great devotees and great magicians visited Mahadev's place but no one could identify the bud, nor could anyone cure Mahadev.

Some wise gods advised about proceeding to Dubalipur, 'A Dubala Kunkna stays there. He should be able to identify the bud.'

The Kunkna was called from Dubalipur. Kunkna recognised Kansara and within moments, Mahadev's fever was cured. Mahadev asked, 'What is the secret of this bud?'

Kunkna put in a demand, 'I will reveal it on one condition—give away the bud to me.'

Now Mahadev agreed. Kunkna said, 'This is Kansara.'

Mahadev grumbled, 'Who cares about this Kansara? Forget it.' He gave the bud to Kunkna.

The bud grew day by day. Countless branches sprawled around. On each branch, ears of different grains sprouted. All the cereals, beans and grains began to grow. The branches were laden with paddy, wheat and pulses.

Mahadev said, 'This Kunkna has cheated me. How can he take away all the food grain?' He threatened Kunkna, scared him and ultimately kicked him out.

The Kunkna was unhappy with the way he was treated. How could a god go back on his words? He started crying. Kansara too felt extremely displeased with the whole incident. In the form of a little child, she went to Kunkna, 'Kunkna, don't cry, I am with you, do as I say. Go to Dubalipur. Clean your place by smearing it with cow dung. Light a lamp and keep it outside at night. You may go





now.’

Kunkna went to Dubalipur, cleaned his place, lit a *diya* and slept outside his house. A miracle happened that night. All the seeds moved from Dhavalisagar to Dubalipur. Kunkna’s granary overflowed with grains. Mahadev had invited all the gods to receive their share of grain. But there wasn’t a single grain left with him. The Kunkna enjoyed abundant food. Kansara blessed Kunkna and advised him to work hard, to keep a big staff in his hands and live honestly in order to be prosperous. She said, ‘Whenever you reap a harvest, worship my idol. I will make you prosperous.’

It is believed that since that day the Kunknas worship Kansara and have been engaged in agriculture.



Once upon a time, a widow and her son lived in a small village. The old widow was a lazy woman. She did not work hard. Even her child was burdensome to her. One day she abandoned her son and started begging in a nearby village. She didn’t care at all for her son. The son grew up. He began to work in other people’s fields to earn a living. A kind and generous man gave him a field and he started tilling his own farm. During one season he sowed corn in the field. He worked very hard, spending the entire day in the field. He tended the crops very well. Each plant was, for him, as valuable as a living person. He would chat for hours with the tiny leaves and shoots.

One day, he saw a luminous halo glowing in the middle of the farm. He ran to the mysterious aura. A beautiful girl was sitting there.

‘Who are you? What are you doing here?’

‘I am an unfortunate woman. I have nowhere to go. I seek shelter here.’

‘I don’t have much to offer but you can stay with me if you wish. We shall share whatever little we get to eat.’







‘Okay. But I will stay with you on one condition—do not ever ask me who I am.’

The boy consented and took her home. In the kitchen, there was a handful of flour, barely enough for even two rotlas. The boy told her to prepare rotlas and eat them because he was not hungry. The girl inferred the situation well. She made four rotlas from the same amount of flour, so they could both have food. She served the boy with great affection.

Thereafter, they lived happily together. With the girl’s presence around, the granary always remained full. With his abundant store of grain, the boy became a rich man within a span of two years. The word spread and someone told the boy’s mother, ‘Your son is the richest man around. Nowadays he stays with a young woman.’

The wicked woman travelled to her son’s home, ‘I have all the rights over my son. Who is this girl to enjoy his earnings? I will throw her out.’

The boy was not at home when the old woman reached her son’s house. The girl was cooking at the stove. The old woman went inside.

‘Who are you? What are you doing here?’

The girl did not respond.

‘Who are you? What are you doing here?’

‘I won’t tell you who I am. You can see with your eyes what I am doing. If you have more to say, do so after your son returns.’

‘Who the hell are you to enjoy the good food of my son? This is my home. Get out.’

‘You had deserted your son, leaving him alone in the world. When I came here there was nothing to eat. We have accumulated the grain after much hard work.’

The wily hag grabbed the girl by her hair and hit her on the face with a burning piece of coal. Then she dragged the girl out of the house.





‘I am going. I had come to make your son prosperous. I wanted to complement his diligence. But I am leaving now. Tell your son that he may find me where he had met me for the first time,’ she cried.

Later, when the boy returned home, he was surprised to see his mother, ‘Where is the girl?’ he asked. The old woman mumbled something but didn’t give a clear answer. After much interrogation, she informed him about the way she had thrown out the girl, and told him about her whereabouts. The boy stormed out of the house and went to the field. His crop was burnt. In the centre of the field the girl sat weeping, hiding her head between her knees. The boy held her hand, ‘Why did you leave home?’

She looked up, her face was charred. The boy was shocked to see her burnt face.

‘I had come to make you rich but...’ The boy pulled her toward him, but with a roaring voice the earth parted and the girl slipped into the gap.

‘Please come back, I beg you.’ There was another loud thunder and the girl slipped deeper. Now only her head was visible on the surface.

‘Young man, can’t you recognise me? I am Kansari. I wished to bless your home with abundant food. But your mother charred my face. Look at your field, the harvest has burnt.’

The boy made another attempt to pull her out. But now even her head had gone deeper. At the spot where she had been, a bud came up. The bud emanated a luminous halo. Then a voice was heard from the sky, ‘Young man, I am Kansari, I am Parvati, I am the goddess of food. I was overwhelmed by your dedication to farming. I admire your qualities even today. Your mother charred my face. Therefore, I am leaving. Your mother is an incarnation of evil. Because of her, whatever we had gained is lost forever. Yet, do not feel disheartened. Work hard. I am present in each seed on earth. I am in each shoot, in every seed. Each grain represents me. Never





waste it. Keep an idol of mine in your home. When you reap the harvest of a season, worship me, I will make you prosperous.'

The boy could see Kansari in each seed. He bowed to the crop in his field. He returned home and built a small shrine of Kansari. Since that day, Kansari, the goddess of food, is worshipped.



There was a king. His name was Kartukidev. He ruled over a large kingdom. He had a daughter. Her name was Kansari. Princess Kansari used to spend more time in the fields than in the palace. When she was young, she cooked small stones which would turn into rice. She rolled a piece of earth and made rotlas from it. As a young woman she wandered in the fields and did the work of a farmer.

Kartukidev said, 'We are of a royal family. We can't do such work.' But Kansari could not resist the temptation to do farming.

Then her father ordered her, 'Make a decision now, if you want to work in the fields, you will have to leave the palace.'

Kansari relinquished the comforts of the palace and started staying in the field. One day, a cat came to Kansari and stayed on with her. Similarly, a parrot and a spider also started living with her. Kansari went to work in her field. The cat accompanied her and devoured the mice in the field. The parrot went to the assembly of gods. He informed Kansari and his other friends about the discussions of the gods. The spider weaved webs on the walls. Kansari disapproved of this activity. The spider was unhappy with her objections.

Kartukidev had quite a few friends in the assembly of gods. He requested them to perform a trick so that Kansari's harvest would fail. The gods decided to keep the world dry for an entire year. The parrot overheard the plan, so Kansari shifted her place and tilled the land from where a water reservoir was easily accessible. It rained very little that year but Kansari's crop did well. All the other areas





faced severe drought.

The following year, the gods conspired to let loose heavy downpour. Again, the parrot warned Kansari in advance and they tilled on sloping land. Others opted to do farming on plain land having abundant resource of water.

It rained heavily that year. Yet, Kansari reaped a rich harvest. The crops of others farmers rotted in the excessive water. The gods were angry. They sent a troop of mice to destroy Kansari's field. But the parrot conveyed the news to Kansari and the cat was all prepared with her platoon of cats. The mice ended up in the hungry belly of the cats. The remaining ones managed to escape.

Now, the gods decided to send a flock of locusts. The parrot informed the spider. He weaved a huge web with the help of his numerous friends. The locusts could not do any harm to the crops. Then a severe drought prevailed on the earth. People died of starvation. But Kansari reaped a rich harvest for two successive years. She distributed her stock of grains among poor people. Whatever she gave away came back doubled in the granary. It was a miracle. People worshipped her as the goddess of food because she gave them food.

This is how Kansari came into existence.





## Tale of Una

Once Mahadev, who dwelt in Dhavalegir, the city on the Kailash, planned to visit the earth to observe the life of the mortals. Mahadev got ready and headed toward the earth.

*He walks on, look! He goes on and on  
The gods are so strange, my mother,  
yava jigana jigana jigana ji..ji..ji....*

Along the way, Mahadev came across the place where Mahasati was observing penance. At that moment, Mahasati was in a deep slumber. Mahadev glanced at her. Mahasati, serene in her beauty, looked like an elegant bride. Mahadev, enthralled by her beauty, got excited.

*God is aroused my friends, god is excited  
Baffled, he stands in Ramkhand and Dhankhand  
ji...ji...ji...*

Mahadev pondered, 'In a moment I will ejaculate. This is not fair. Moreover, the seeds will be wasted if they drop on the ground. What should I do?'

*God is thinking a way out  
Mahadev is thinking a way out  
yava jigana jigana ji, ji...ji...ji...*





Mahadev plucked a leaf from a nearby tree and made a small cup. He ejaculated into it. What should he do now?

*God is thinking a way out*  
*Mahadev is thinking of a way out*  
*ji...ji...ji...*

Mahadev thought for a while and then poured the seeds into the nose of Mahasati. The semen entered her body. This was god's doing and then her body did the rest. Mahasati became pregnant.

*A child is conceived my mother*  
*A child is conceived*  
*yava jigana jigana ji re...*  
*ji..ji..ji....*

Mahadev returned to Kailash. The child grew in Mahasati's womb. A day passed, two days passed, a week passed and eventually a month got over.

*The child grows within, dear,*  
*Mahasati! Your child grows within,*  
*The child grows within, dear,*  
*Mahasati...ji..ji..ji...*

Nine months and nine days passed by. The child was now fully developed. Mahasati felt pain in her womb. The child stretched its hands and legs and started moving. It wanted to get out.

*The child moves further, dear,*  
*My mother, your child moves ahead,*  
*ji..ji..ji...*

Mahasati cleaned a space and lay down on the ground. Dev Vanasa and Dev Dhanasa came over from Dwarka. They took care of Mahasati who delivered a baby boy.





*A child is delivered, dear,  
Mahasati you are jigana ji,  
A boy is born, dear,  
Mahasati you are jigana ji,  
ji...ji...ji...*

Dev Vanasa and Dev Dhanasa left after the rituals on the fifth, sixth and twelfth day from the day of birth. Mahasati wondered, 'What will I do with this unwanted child? I don't know anything about its father.' She thought of abandoning the child. Holding the child with its hands, she uttered, 'Let the boy find his father's place.' And then she flung away the little one.

*A baby is dangling in the air, dear  
Look! A poor child is hovering above,  
yava jigana jigana jigana ji re...  
ji..ji..ji...*

Immediately, the breeze caught the little child, carried it all the way to Kailash and landed it in Mahadev's courtyard.

*The boy is weeping aloud, dear,  
Mahasati, your lonely baby is wailing here,  
The boy is weeping aloud, dear,  
Mahasati, your baby jigana ji...*

The painful cries struck the ears of the gods and they rushed out into the garden. A baby boy was found lying in the garden. A maid picked up the child and took him to Mahadev's home. Along with the other children of the gods, Mahasati's child started growing. Mahadev called him Madansinha.

A poor man's child takes years to grow up, that of a wealthy person takes a few days to become a man, but a divine child grows up in a blink of the eyes.





*The boy is growing day and night  
Madan is growing day and night  
Growing in Ramkhand and Dhankhand  
ji..ji..ji....*

One day, Madansinha, now a handsome young man, told Mahadev that he should be permitted to search a wife for himself.

*Look at this bold youth, friends!  
Son of Mahasati! You are jigana ji..  
ji..ji..ji...*

Mahadev, with his characteristic generosity, allowed him to choose a partner.

*Madansinha strides away  
The eager youth strides away  
My child walks away, ji..ji..ji..  
Madansinha strides away, ji..ji..ji...*

Madansinha climbed down the steps of Kailash and started exploring the land of Mirat. On Sansargadh, he found a beautiful damsel named Avtar. He felt fascinated by Avtar but she did not have any interest in worldly life. She wished to observe penance.

*The young man is thinking of a way out  
Madansinha is thinking of a way out  
yava jigana jigana ji re,  
ji..ji..ji...*

Avtar made it very clear to Madansinha, 'I am not interested in worldly life. My life is devoted to god. I am observing penance. I request you not to disturb me.'

*Look how she speaks,  
How boldly the girl speaks!  
Avtar you are jigana ji...*







*ji..ji..ji....*

But Madansinha was determined to marry Avtar. Many days passed by. Avtar attained puberty. For five days she remained secluded. On the sixth day her body became dry and she went to the river to take bath, taking dry clothes with her.

*Look she ambles on, slowly she goes on,  
Avtar walks to the river, my mother,  
She is going to take bath dear,  
ji..ji..ji....*

Avtar went to the Purna river. She looked around before taking off her clothes. Madansinha was standing right behind her. So she went to the river Tapi. Madansinha followed her to Tapi. Avtar immediately left for Narmada. To get rid of Madansinha, she kept changing places; from Narmada she went to Ganga, from Ganga to Yamuna, then to Ara, Par and Kaveri. But Madansinha seemed determined to pursue her. Avtar then dashed to the Shehu ocean in great speed. Madansinha lost her on the way. Avtar jumped into the pond at Unai.

*Look how she jumped, dear  
Avtar is in the Unai, dear  
Bathing in the pond ji..ji..ji....*

After a while, when Avtar opened her eyes she found herself under water. And right before her, Madansinha was peering at her through the warm, clean water of the pond. When in an attempt to breathe, he exhaled through his mouth, the water bubbles entered Avtar's mouth. She conceived a child.

*A child is conceived dear,  
ji..ji..ji....  
A child is conceived dear,  
ji..ji..ji....*





Avtar emerged from the pond and returned to Sansargadh. Madansinha returned to Kailash. Destined by the almighty, the life in Avtar's womb grew.

*The child is growing within, dear,  
My mother, your child is jigana ji...  
The child is growing within, dear,  
My mother, your child is jigana ji...*

A day passed, two days passed, a month passed, nine months and nine days were over. The child was fully developed. A baby boy was born. Avtar named him Una.

*The child is on the waist,  
Yashoda moves around  
The child is growing,  
Look the child is growing day by day,  
yava jigana jigana jigana  
ji...ji...ji...*

Avtar thought, 'What will I do with this unwanted child? What will I tell him if he asks me about his father? Moreover, what will happen of my penance if I become engaged in bringing up the child?'

*Avtar is thinking of a way out  
She is thinking of a way out  
yava jigana jigana jigana ji re...  
ji..ji..ji...*

Avtar flung the boy away, far in the sky and he fell into the Shehu ocean. He started sinking in the vast ocean.

The goddess of oceans, Jaladevi, panicked, 'Oh, if the little child dies in the Shehu I will be accused of murder. It will be an unpardonable sin.' She immediately took action. Her waves hurled the boy on the shore and pushed him further into a small bushy





growth nearby.



In the Bhanvar cave of Dhanarako, dwelt a shepherd with his wife. His name was Reva. Reva had hundreds of cows. He was rich. He had abundance of food and other daily necessities of life at home.

Reva's wife could not bear all single child. All their prayers and penance failed to produce a little one who would play in their courtyard. They would always appeal to the god above,

*'Oh god! Give us a sweet little child,  
We will offer you a ring of gold,  
We will make you a golden temple,  
Please listen to us, consider our demand,  
Oh god! Give us a sweet little child.'*

Reva had golden toys, tiny vessels and ornaments. But without a child everything seemed futile,

*'Oh god! Give us a sweet little child  
O, give us a sweet little child.'*

Once, Reva's wife went to the ocean to wash clothes. There she heard cries of a weeping child. At first, she thought it to be her imagination but then she realised that it was the cry of a human child. It was for the first time that she had heard the cry of a newborn baby. Her maternal instincts awakened. She ran in the direction of the voice. She found a beautiful child beneath a tree. She picked up the child.

*Reva is holding the child,  
Reva is stroking the child,  
The child in Ramkhand and Dhankhand  
ji...ji...ji...*

Reva looked around but there was no one who claimed to be





the child's guardian. After waiting for a long time she walked away, taking the child with her. She fed him and made him comfortable in the new surroundings. The boy felt warm, therefore she decided to call him Una.

*This is a swing for you,  
I will rock you dear!  
Little boy, give a smile,  
I will rock you dear!*

Reva returned from the jungle. On his way back he plucked a wild fruit and hurried homewards. He noticed that his wife was unusually jovial and the swing too looked heavy, as if a child was asleep in it.

In a cheerful voice Reva asked his wife, 'Tell me what is there in my hand?'

'I will answer your question but first you must tell me about the guest that we have today,' answered Reva's wife, with a chuckle.

*Look! She has asked him a question,  
How happy she is!  
yava jigana jigana jigana ji,  
ji..ji..ji....*

Reva answered readily, 'I know that we have a newborn baby here. The baby is sleeping peacefully in the swing, isn't it? Now tell me what do I have in my hand?'

She smilingly replied, 'Well dear, this is the season of wild fruits. I am sure you have one in your hand.'

Reva was very happy. There was a sweet baby in his home today. Though it wasn't his own, he felt a strong affection for the child. He started rocking the swing.

A child on the waist, Yashoda moved around. Beautiful Yashoda, charming Yashoda, walked around.





*The child is growing day by day,  
yava jigana jigana jigana ji...  
ji..ji..ji...*

Reva looked after Una well. In the seventh month Una began to crawl on his knees. After some time, he could stand and within a short period, he could walk twelve steps at a time. He could say, 'ma' and 'pa'. As a young boy, Una played with calves and other cattle.

*The boy is romping around,  
Una is playing about,  
Look there at the cave of Bhanvar,  
ji...ji...ji...*

When Una grew up, he requested his father, 'I would like to take the cows for grazing. Tell me, how many will you give me? What is my share?'

*How bold he is!  
ji...ji...ji...  
Una is a brave boy,  
ji...ji...ji...*

Reva gave him one hundred and twenty five cows and instructed him, 'You may go wherever you wish, but do not go anywhere around the fort of Khambha.'

The next day, early in the morning, Una drove his herd. He had made up his mind to go first to the fort of Khambha. But just when he started, Devbahola appeared before him and blessed Una. Una fell on his feet and prayed earnestly. Then he went off on his first adventure.

*He is driving the herd,  
He is with his cows,*





*Una the shepherd is in Ramkhand and Dhankhand,  
ji...ji...ji...*

There were orchards and gardens on the hill of Khambha. Their sweet fragrance filled the atmosphere and the cows, disturbed by the smell, could not graze. They stood spellbound, gazing at the fort.

*The cows are gazing, O cows stand still,  
Here in the Ramkhand and Dhankhand,  
ji...ji...ji...*

Una noticed that there wasn't a path to get to the top. How would the herd make its way? So Una made a stick out of the sisom branch and cut through the dense bushes.

*The path is ready, dear,  
Look brother, the path invites you ahead,  
yava jigana jigana jigana ji...  
ji...ji...ji...*

Una turned his cows into tiny pebbles and bundled them in a cloth. On reaching the hill top, he turned the pebbles into cows. The cattle grazed in the orchards at leisure. While returning, Una once again made pebbles of the cows and easily clambered down the hill.

*Una is back again, Una is back,  
My child you are jigana ji...  
ji...ji...ji...*

Mother Avtar at Sansargadh dreamt of the green orchards of Khambhagadh. The next day she sent Kuruja and Mokhavala to get a report of the situation.

*Kuruja goes to the orchards  
Mokhavala goes to the orchards  
ji...ji...ji...*





Kuruja and Mokhavala came over to Khambhagadh but found the orchards completely devastated. It was obvious that a huge herd of cattle had grazed at leisure there. The sisters started crying and returned to Avtar. Mavli Avtar heard their voice from afar but thought that it was a jolly song being sung by the happy sisters.

*How they returned crying,  
Kuruja is crying, Mokhavala is crying,  
ji...ji...ji...*

The next day Una went to Khambhagadh instead of Sansargadh. There too his cattle grazed upon the abundant fruits, flowers and grass in the blooming orchards. Mavli wondered, 'It is impossible for a human to enter these thick orchards. And here I find a herd ravaging my gardens. How is this possible?'

Una was a clever boy. He would bury the cow dung in the fields. No one could see the dung and the fields got manure. Thus nobody came to know that cows were grazing in the orchards.

*How clever the boy is, dear,  
Una my child, you are very clever,  
ji...ji...ji...*

Mavli became extremely worried about the situation. In the form of a pigeon, she set off to take a view of the orchards and the surrounding area. She found some leaves, grass and grains lying in the field of Una. She was sure that Una was behind the recent marauding of the orchards.

*Una is caught now, friends!  
His tricks won't work, friends!  
yava jigana ji re, ji...ji...ji...*

The next day, Una, with his herd, was heading toward Kansaragadh. Avtar sent Kuruja and Mokhavala to seize him. They disguised themselves as woodcutters. They asked Una to show them





the way out of the woods.

*The sisters played a trick, dear,  
They laid a trap for Una, dear,  
yava jigana jigana ji re...  
ji...ji...ji...*

But Una was too sharp to be caught by such trickery. He realised the intentions of the two women. He pointed out the direction to them from a distance and dashed off. Kuruja and Mokhavala could not catch him.

The sisters then planned another trap. Kuruja turned into a tree with beautiful flowers. Mokhavla, as a little girl, went to Una and pleaded, 'Una, I want those colourful flowers. Will you pluck a few for me? Please?'

*I want colourful flowers,  
I want fragrant flowers, flowers!  
I want all these flowers!*

Una was duped this time. He climbed the tree and suddenly the tree became bigger. Una fell. He made another attempt. This time he reached the top of the tree but the moment he started plucking flowers, the tree moved and flew toward the clouds. After a while, the tree turned upside down and Una was thrown down on the rampart of the fort at Khambhagadh. Avtar stood right before him. She saw Una and her maternal instinct rekindled. She took him in her lap and suckled him.

*Look! he is feeding on milk,  
How hungry he is,  
Avtar, my mother, dear,  
ji...ji...ji...*

Avtar instructed Una about all the forts. She taught him to worship Khambhagadh, Limbagadh, Tulashigadh, Avadhagadh,







Tupigadh, Sendaregadh, Suryagadh, Buryagadh, Gadhavabari, Shuklatirth, Suritagadh, Buritgadh, Belakapar, Upajgadh, Nipajgadh, Bhuper, Satapuda, Devamal, Mangyagadh, Tungyagadh, Nahalyagadh, Tambolegadh, Dudhgadh, Phulgadh, Rupagadh, Sonagadh, Gavalan, Sendvad Durung, Gavulgadh, Raykakar, Pankakar, Dhulakakad, Senakakad, Pandavgadh, Chinchkund, Bhonware, Navavane, Jamanyagadh, Nadage Pahad, Tambolegadh, Kothargadh, Tankyagadh, Salergadh, Salota, Takaryagadh, Timawagadh, Gadagudh and many others.

*The boy is learning, friends,  
The boy is learning well,  
yava jigana jigana jigana ji...  
ji...ji...ji...*

After giving Una all the necessary information, she said, 'I am present in all these forts, but I love to stay at Khambhagadh. Now, you should go back home and worship Dunganardev. Come to me later with all the festivities. Okay? You may go now.'

*Thus speaks Avatar, dear  
Avatar, my mother, oh mother  
yava jigana jigana ji...*

Una went back and became busy in tending his cows.



Reva decided to arrange Una's marriage with a pretty girl. Una got married. He had a sister-in-law whose husband's name was Mashe.

*Una is now married, friend,  
Una is wedded to a dame,  
ji...ji...ji...*

Due to his affectionate treatment of the cattle and hard work,





Una became a prosperous merchant. Mashe felt jealous of Una's progress. Imitating Una, he too wanted to be the head of a prosperous and large family. Just before a week of the full-moon day of the winter season, Avtar appeared in Una's dream and reminded him about the celebration at Dunganardev.

*Its the time of joy, friends,  
Its the time of festival,  
Festival on the full moon, friends  
yava jigana jigana jigana ji...  
ji...ji...ji...*

In his blind parody, Mashe too started preparing for the big festival. Una requested Mashe to join him. But Mashe stuck to his idea of a separate celebration.

*He is a stubborn fool, friends,  
Mashe, my brother,  
ji...ji...ji...*

Una was to lead a procession to Khambhagadh. He asked Mashe to choose some other hill. Once again, aping Una, Mashe insisted upon going to Khambhagadh where Una had called the *thali bhagats*. Mashe called upon the *ghanghali bhagats*. Both Una and Mashe celebrated with the usual gaiety and then headed toward Khambhagadh with the processions.

*Look! They go to Khambhagadh,  
The merry procession goes there,  
ji...ji...ji...*

Mashe demanded, 'Una, I want to test your truthfulness. You may be a cheat, who knows? You will have to perform a magic. I want to hear the sounds of a crying child and of tinkling anklets from within Khambhagadh.'





*Look at this shameless man,  
How he demands to test Una,  
ji...ji...ji...*

Una felt offended. He prayed to mother Avtar and requested her to help him prove his integrity. In an instance, sounds of crying and tinkling resounded the air.

*How a child is weeping  
How a woman's anklets tinkle  
From where do the sounds come?  
yava jigana jigana jigana ji...  
ji...ji...ji...*

Mashe was ready with another challenge to test Una, 'Send your Mavli to take a walk inside the fort.' Una's Mavli went inside the fort and returned after some time. The arrogant Mashe sent his Mavli inside. But Mashe was not a pure man. He had eaten animal flesh and drunk liquor. His Mavli lost the way and never returned.

*Mavli has lost the way, friends  
Mavli has not returned, friends  
yava jigana jigana jigana ji...  
ji...ji...ji...*

When Una returned home, his sister-in-law came and requested Una to find her husband. Una again went to Khambhagadh and pleaded, 'Dungardev, please guide the Mavli to get out. She is human and will die if left inside for long.'

*Una prays to dev,  
yava jigana jigana jigana ji...  
ji...ji...ji...*

Mavli came out but Mashe did not. Una requested that Mashe be sent back. But Dungardev and Mavli Avtar had turned Mashe





into a stone. She pushed him down from atop Khambhagadh. Mashe, in the form of a stone, got stuck in a tree.

Even today, we find the stone caught in a tree at the fort of Khambhagadh near Avadha village in Vansda taluka of Navsari district.

Then an *akashwani* reverberated through the sky, 'No one dare behave in such hostile manner, otherwise they will be punished as Mashe.'



## Glossary

### Kunkna terms and proper names requiring explanation

*Aar*: high tide

*Adivasi*: Indian word for tribal or indigenous communities

*aghedo*: a medicinal herb; it is believed that after eating this herb a person does not feel hungry for three to six months

*akashwani*: divine utterance

*Akhatrij*, a festival on the third day of the bright half of Vaishakh (April-May), the month of Vikram calendar.

*Amba*: the consort of Mahadev, Amba is a form of Durga. There are varied myths associated with the different forms of the goddesses in India.

*amrut*: a divine drink that bestows eternal life

*apsara*: celestial dancers

*arati*: a ritual involving the moving of lighted earthen lamps before someone by way of worship or honour

*avatar*: incarnation

*bhabhi*: brother's wife

*bhagat*: meaning 'one devoted to god,' the word refers to a priest who has several functions in the Kunkna society. Bhagats are carriers and transmitters of tribal knowledge

*Bhavani*: a form of Parvati





*bidi*: roll of betel leaf sprinkled with areca nut; it is used for smoking

*bindi*: a red ornamental mark made by women on the forehead as adornment

*Chaitra*: the sixth month of Vikram calendar, March-April

*chandarbhal*: Chandra means the moon. Chandrabhal is a weapon in crescent shape with a sharp edge

*Chandradev*: chandra is moon; moon god

*Dev*: god

*Devabhola*: Goddess of cows and cattle

*Devkaren*: The word Devkaren comprises 'deva' meaning god and 'ara' that stands for 'making', 'doing' and also for 'act'.

*dhak*: a musical instrument played at the time of weddings as well as during rituals performed after death

*Dhamandev*: dhaman is snake; snake god

*Dhegudev* and *Megudev*: gods of the clouds

*dhoti*: loin cloth

*Divaso*: A festival on the no-moon day of the Vikram calendar month, Ashadh falling in June-July

*diya*: a mud vessel used as a lamp, lit with a cotton wick and oil as fuel

*door of the turtle*: In the Kunkna myth, the earth was created from the soil taken from the back of the turtle. Therefore, the entrance of the city is called the door of the turtle.

*Dungardev*: Dungar means a mountain. It is believed that each mountain is an abode of a god or a goddess.

*Dwarka*: the city where gods dwell

*gadh*: a fort on a mountain. The long list given in the tale is of several mountains and hills that have their own respective goddess; each mountains is treated as a deity





*Gamdev*: gam is village; gamdev is deity of the village

*Ganvadevi*: village goddess

*ghanghali*: a string instrument. Two mud pots, the feather of a peacock, a stick and a thin wire are used to make a *ghanghali*. One requires special training to play it, and only *bhagats* play it at the time of religious rituals

*Ghatadev*: god of trees

*Himaidevi*: a goddess

*Holi*: a festival

*Jadi Ikar*: a kind of worship and rituals associated with it

*Jaladevi*: jal is water, devi is goddess; goddess of water

*jiganaji* : a refrain repeated for the sake of musical effect

*jowar*: a kind of grain or sorghum

*Jugananda and Bhimabali*: names of gods

*Kailash*: one of the peaks of the Himalayas, abode of Mahadev

*kajal*: collyrium

*Kaliyug*: the fourth and the last age of history of universe as imagined by mythologists. It is the age comprising 4,32,000 years, beginning from 18<sup>th</sup> February, 3102 B.C.

*kamandal*: an earthen or wooden pot of an ascetic

*katha*: story

*khand*: It is used here to convey the meaning of 'a piece of land'. It is also used to mean 'a continent'. Here the words are used as names of a city

*kumbha*: vessel

*Madansinha*: Madan is the name of Kamadev, the god of love

*madel*: a musical instrument like mridang





*magardhajin*: a creature of the sea

*maidan*: ground

*mantra*: chant

*mataki*: a big round earthen vessel

*Mavli* is a Mother Goddess of the Kunknas. She has seven manifestations: Nilay, Kal Sevar, Dudha Sevar, Tumba Sevar, Karuja, Tuhi Mavli, Fula Sevar

*Meru*: a mythical mountain around which all planets are said to revolve. It is imagined to be made of gold and gems.

*Mirat*: wealth. Here, it is the name of a religion

*mridang*: a musical instrument. One who plays the *mridang* is known as a *mridangi*

*Nachen*: Nachen means dance. They are a group who perform tamasha, a folk-theatre of Maharashtra

*Nagdev*: nag is snake, dev is god; snake god

*Narandev*: Vishnu. The tale has the holy trinity in it. Baramdev is Brahma and Mahadev is Shankar.

*Navaratri*: nava is nine, ratra is night; a festival that lasts for nine nights

*Parvati*: consort of Mahadev

*pativrata*: a woman loyal and dedicated to her husband

*pidhi*: pidhi is a box in which a betel nut is kept in the memory of the dead

*pitambar*: pitambar is a yellow garment usually worn at a religious ritual

*Posha*: Third month of the Vikram calendar, December-January

*rotla*: a thick, soft bread of circular shape

*rudraksh mala*: a rosary made of dry berries considered sacred to Shiva.







*Sansargadh*: sansar means word or wordly life. Here, it is the name of a city

*Saptashrungi*: *shrung* means peak of a mountain, *sapta* stands for the number 'seven'; Goddess of seven mountains

*Saraswati*: Goddess of learning, usually represented as the wife of Brahma. Brahma is believed to be creator of the universe.

*Satimata*: sati means a chaste and virtuous woman. Mata means mother.

*savasino*: a woman whose husband is alive.

*Saydev*: one of the Pandavs in the *Mahabharata*. He is believed to have deep knowledge of astrology. Here he is a deity, not a Pandav.

*Seemdev*: seema means outskirts; god protecting the village outskirts

*shivaling*: God Shiva is usually worshipped as a stone phallus; *ling* means the phallus.

*Suryadev*: surya is sun, Sun God

*swayamvara*: a ceremony of olden days in which a woman chose a husband for herself

*taluka*: division of a district

*tambemahover*: a musical instrument

*Taradev*: tara is stars, dev is god; god of the stars

*tarapu*: A musical instrument made out of a gourd, believed to be sacred and divine.

*telavana*: *Tel* means oil. Oil is used in the ritual, so the word *telavana*

*thali*: a thin stick is kept vertically at the centre of a bronze thali with the help of wax and honey. Keeping the thali in the lap, when the player gently rubs his palms on the stick, it creates a sweet melody. The instrument is played by those who recite folktales and is very popular in Dang.





*toddy*: an intoxicating drink made from fermented palm juice

*topi*: cap

*Una*: warm

*Vaghdev*: vagh is tiger; tiger god

*Veer*: low tide

*Yama*: God of death. Jama is a derived word

*Yashoda*: Lord Krishna's mother

